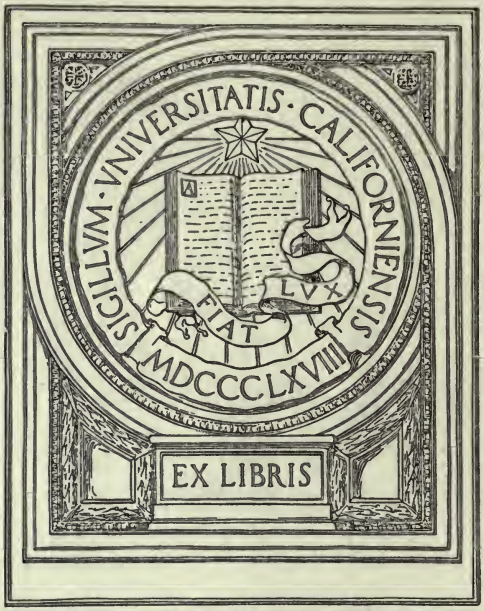
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William Bruce Leffingwell

WILD FOWL SHOOTING:

CONTAINING

SCIENTIFIC AND PRACTICAL DESCRIPTIONS

OF

Wild Fowl: Their Resorts, Habits, Flights

AND THE MOST

SUCCESSFUL METHOD OF HUNTING THEM.

TREATING OF THE SELECTION OF GUNS FOR WILD FOWL SHOOTING; HOW TO LOAD, TO AIM, AND TO USE THEM SUCCESSFULLY; DECOYS, AND THE PROPER MANNER OF USING THEM; BLINDS, HOW AND WHERE TO CONSTRUCT THEM; BOATS, HOW TO BUILD AND USE THEM SCIENTIFICALLY; RETRIEVERS, THEIR CHARACTERISTICS, HOW TO SELECT, AND HOW TO TRAIN THEM.

By WILLIAM BRUCE LEFFINGWELL.

CHICAGO:
RAND, McNALLY & CO.
1888.

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WILLIAM BRUCE LEFFINGWELL.

TO MY FRIEND,

BENJAMIN S. WOODWARD,

OF LYONS, IOWA,

MY HUNTING COMPANION, AN EXPERT WILD FOWL SHOT, AND A GENTLEMAN IN THE FULLEST ACCEPTATION OF THE TERM.

THIS BOOK

IS DEDICATED WITH FRATERNAL AFFECTION

BY

ITS AUTHOR.

924745

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INTRODUCTION.

In presenting this book to the public, it is with the intention of supplying a long felt want, and to furnish, to those who desire such knowledge a complete exposition of the science of Wild Fowl Shooting as applied to inland waters. The grave responsibility resting on me to successfully complete an undertaking of this character is fully realized; for I am aware that with one exception, no American has ever attempted to write a book exclusively on the subject of Wild Fowl Shooting. To do so, and to do it beyond the scope of intelligent criticism, one must be blessed with peculiar opportunities for observation and study, besides possessed of the gift to disclose to others, in a pleasing and instructive manner, the researches of his mind, and the discoveries of a life-time, in the forests and fields, with Nature and birds.

An inherited love for field sports showed itself in early childhood, and I enjoyed nothing better than to wander through the blossoming fields, along the hillsides, or sitting at some gurgling brook, splashing my feet in the limpid water, to study animal and animated life. The years glided by, and my desire to learn more of birds grew with me,—especially was this the case with wild fowl. I tried to learn of them from books,

but what I most wished for, to know how to successfully pursue them with a gun, no man seemed to write of. I can recall how often in those early days I searched every book on sporting literature, desirous of learning something on this subject. But while books have been written *ad infinitum* on dogs, sporting reminiscences, boats and game birds, yet on this subject, one I longed for most, the scientific hunting of wild fowl, there appeared but short articles engrafted into other books. My secret disappointment, then, was the spur that urged me to this work, for I resolved that what books denied me, I would learn from wild Nature,—she should be my book. And under the broad canopy of the sky, with the trees, the flowers, the grass and the water, as my classmates, I would accept her as my teacher, and become a pupil who would profit by my opportunities.

Knowing there are so many young men who feel as I did, anxious to learn the secrets of wild fowl shooting, it affords me pleasure to present this work, for from it they can learn in a few hours, the results of my life's studies.

To those who are more advanced in the art, and who have profited by their experience, my fraternal wish is to present in attractive form, and bring back to them, remembrances of many happy days they have passed in wild fowl shooting. For judging them by myself, one of our greatest pleasures is, when some one paints, with words of truth, scenes we have so often enjoyed.

Field sports are either elevating or degrading. I choose to make them the former, and the teachings set forth in this book are of that character. Sportsmen are not and should not be prone to selfishness. I speak to him who by the ties of business cares is bound to close

confinement, who enjoys the pure air, the refreshing prairie winds, the glad sunshine, far from city life. One should not hunt for the purpose of seeing what havoc he can make among the feathered tribe, nor participate in indiscriminate slaughter on a chosen side, for club hunts are barbarous; rather let him go forth for wild fowl in the crisp October air, when leaves are fluttering to the earth, when the woods and fields assume a sombre hue, when sighing winds breathe through the tree tops, when the acorns are dropping, and the pattering of the shucks beneath some tall hickory tree tells him the fox squirrel is laying in his winter's store. One who cannot enjoy such scenes, destiny did not intend for a hunter.

> "Come forth into the light of things,
> Let Nature be your teacher,
> One impulse from the vernal wood
> May teach you more of man,
> Of moral evil and of good,
> Than all the sages can."

A creative mind made all animate things subservient to the will of man, and if the amateur hunter will but try, it is within his power to divine the thoughts of wild fowl as readily as the stars are read in the sky. A study is therefore necessary of the habits and resorts of these birds, where they are going and why, their peculiar calls, whether they are cries of fright, or innocent cacklings of satisfaction.

As the mallard is the duck universally found throughout the West, it is the one most fully treated of. Snipe cannot strictly be classified as wild fowl, but being found in the marsh I have taken the liberty to write of them, believing the reader will justify me after reading the article.

The ornithological descriptions of wild fowl are taken from Audubon and Wilson, but comparatively few sportsmen care for these scientific portraits of the birds, at the same time they are handy for reference, and, as a sportsman friend says, "there is no one thing that affords the same satisfaction to a hunter, after he has fallen over a brush pile, while chasing a crippled duck, as to be able to express his opinion of that duck in correct ornithological language."

Wild fowl shooting is a science; and when one considers how little it is understood by those who think they are experts, it is surprising. Many hunters of means give it no especial thought, although they are excellent shots. They have stated times of going, and certain localities to go to; when they arrive at their destination some local hunter takes them where the birds are and their joy is complete. No need of especial thought on their part, for wealth carves the way to success with them. But to the average hunter, his success depends on his knowledge of the habits of the birds, and unless he is skilled in his calling, he is apt to be disappointed over the day's hunt. There is but one remedy for him, that is, study and observation.

The sculling of wild fowl is a science of itself. This method of hunting seems confined to a comparatively small territory of the vast West. In this volume it is explained in its many forms. Possibly the reader may think there is mentioned with great frequency the handling of decoys, the building of blinds, and proper aim,—but they are the primary studies, the reading, writing and arithmetic of scientific wild fowl shooting, and must be thoroughly understood before one can think of graduating. They cannot be learned too well,

and he who desires to become proficient in this line of hunting should commit them to memory, and make them applicable when the occasion presents itself.

The mechanical construction and the choke boring of fire arms I have avoided discussing, for they are secrets of the trade, and could be of no possible benefit to the majority of my readers. This book has not been gotten up for the purpose of advertising any particular gun or ammunition, and the reader will find no partiality in that respect, my sincere desire being, to give to the sporting brotherhood, a book instructive and elevating to the young, full of pleasing reminiscences to the experienced, and one worthy of being a fireside companion in every home; one that your wife or your sister can open and see, that a man can be a sportsman and a gentleman.

WILD FOWL SHOOTING.

CHAPTER I.

REVERIES.

"The childhood shows the man,
As morning shows the day."

When Thomas Hood wrote those beautiful lines, "I remember, I remember, the place where I was born," he had passed the days of his youth, and was in the bloom of a vigorous manhood. Of the many beautiful poems, emanating from his fertile brain, this one must have afforded him the greatest pleasure in writing, and no doubt was the one he loved best. It not only came from his brain, but sprang from the deepest recesses of his heart. "He remembered, he remembered, the place where he was born." Why did he remember it? Because, after years had rolled over his head, changing the golden hair of youth into the sombre hue of manhood, streaking with gray the hair of his later years, he could look back into the past, ruminate over the joys and sorrows of his life, and recall with pleasure and gratification the scenes of his early childhood. And who cannot?

I have in my mind's eye at this moment, a youth of

twelve summers, a laughing, romping, rosy-cheeked lad, overflowing with animal spirits, his bright, blue eyes and smiling face an ever welcome sight to his companions. Whistling and singing all the livelong day. His father, distinguished for his eminent legal abilities, forgot all business cares, and ever indulgent, became a boy again when with his romping son. Brothers and sisters had he. His home stood on the hillside, and a happy one it was, made so by fraternal and filial love. That this boy should learn to love field sports, the dog and gun, is not a matter of surprise, as his father was passionately fond of them.

We see him in the month of June, that month of rosiest hue, when all nature is dressed in holiday attire, roaming through field and meadow, over hills and valleys; or, dreamily sitting on the bank of the murmuring brook, his wandering thoughts far away, as he listens to the carol of bright plumaged birds, his nostrils filled with the delicate odor of blossoming flowers, his eyes entranced by the surpassing beauty of Nature everywhere around him, in the heavens above, in the earth below.

The air, laden with the perfume of flowers,
Delights his senses; he notes not the hours.
Bright butter-cups, daisies, sweet violets,
Lure him on, and he forgets
School, playmates, joys, disappointment,
And rambles amid Nature in sweet content.
He hears strange sounds. There in his sight,
A mottled bird calls to him, "Bob White," "Bob White,"
"Bob White," he says, whistling from his post,
Then looks at the boy, as if he were lost,
And wonders what he is doing here alone,

So young, so small, so far from home.
"Coo—Coo—" is uttered by the turtle dove,
As she mournfully calls her truant love,
Then flying and alighting on the topmost limb,
Silently looks down and watches him.

Walking slowly, tramping wearily,
He hears the brown thrush, singing cheerily,
Sitting, flitting, before him all the way,
Bobbing, peering, singing his roundelay.
Weary with walking, he wanders in quest
Of some friendly tree, beneath its shade to rest;
Picks off the flowers, holds them in his hand,
Looks around, sees more, at his command;
He hears the rippling of a babbling brook,
And sees it concealed in a hidden nook,
The traveller would have passed it by,
But for its welcoming, gladsome cry.
Listening to the lark, the robin's matin,
He sees a flower, dressed in golden satin;
Places it with the others, red, pink, and green,
Says: "Many a flower is born to blush unseen,"
But this one; a lady's slipper; is so rare,
It shall not, "waste its fragrance on the desert air".
The waning day bids him he must start,
Regretfully sighing, he rises, lingers, then departs.
In after years, he often recalls these hours,
Passed with Nature, birds, and sweet smelling flowers.

Who, among his young companions, could imitate the cry of the quail, the duck, the jay, the goose, the crow, better than he? could send the shaft further, or hit with big headed arrow the penny oftener?

And then, when the happy and proud owner of his first gun, a light single-barrel muzzle-loader! In my imagination, I can see him now, gun in hand, a brass cap box filled with percussion caps in his vest pocket, his coat pockets stuffed with paper for wadding; around his neck, suspended by a string at his right side, an old vanilla bottle, filled with powder, while hanging at his left, another bottle half full of shot; walking first by his side, then behind him, are his comrades, junior in years, his body guard and retrievers. Thus he marched forth on an October day searching for quail. At intervals, imitating the call of the bird by whistling, while occasionally, one of his younger companions would laugh out in childish glee, rolling his eyes and opening wide his mouth, while ear-splitting notes issue from his throat,

"Oh-ee-he, Oh-ee-he." Great days and happy ones were they for that boy. Then again we see him a few years later; he now has a double-barrelled gun; his accoutrements are also changed. Now he hunts on horseback, riding a pony, known for her gentle disposition. Approaching a slough, he hears the flutter of wings, over his head, and a little to the left is a flock of ten mallards. He fires at the leader, and kills the third one. No soliloquizing for him; it doesn't enter his head that he made a clean miss, but he regrets the fact that his gun scatters so much on birds, when it makes such an excellent target on paper.

He sees ducks lighting in a pond. How well he knows that hole! Often and often has he wormed his lithe body toward that spot to meet his reward by knocking over a mallard, sometimes a pair of them. As he crawls along, he stops for breath, then peers silently over the waving grass, trying to catch a glimpse of the ducks. He looks back at the pony, while she, gentle, faithfull Nell, untethered, obedient to her master and companion's call waits for him, and nibbles and munches away at the succulent bottom grass. Those were the happy days of his young life. No cares, no responsibilities, nothing to mar the mirror of his boyhood days. All was with him unalloyed pleasure and happiness. To be sure, he was vexed with school, especially when the wild pigeon was seeking its northern home; but the vexation was borne with complacency, because he knew that after school time was his, and the flight of the pigeon would continue until the mantle of darkness was thrown over the earth, until after the going down of the setting sun. We see him in the

summer time on the islands, among the willows, birch and maple, pushing himself along with youthful impetuosity and strength through the brush, over fallen logs, perspiring under a July sun, seeking the saucy woodcock. We see the bird escape from behind an old pile of driftwood, dart to the top of the nearest tree, hear the report of the gun, see the cock dart for the ground again, then run skulking away to hide, while chagrin is depicted on that young face. With setter he once more finds the secreted bird ; we see the bird rise again to glide over the tree tops; hear again the report of the gun but instead of the bird darting to the ground, running and hiding, the air is sprinkled with floating feathers, the bird falls a victim to the youthful hunter's careful aim No look of chagrin and disappointment *now* o'erspreads his face. Instead, his eyes sparkle with brilliancy, a quiet smile of confidence and satisfaction plays around his mouth, as he fondly pats the head of the setter who brings to him the dead bird. Perspiring and thirsty, he walks over the fallen brush, among willow twigs, and doffing his hat seats himself on an old stump at the water's edge. Ever on the alert, he glances up and down the stream, knowing that a pair of green-winged teal may drop in unannounced. A dark shadow flits before him ; looking hastily around, he sees alighting in the soft mud within thirty feet of him, a magnificent woodcock. *Mirabile visu!* He now has an opportunity to watch unperceived this sagacious bird. The sun shining on its dusky plumage, the woodcock appears in all its wild freedom. It looks up and down the shore, gently shakes itself, then, as if an ardent admirer of its own beauty, struts backward and forward; now it delicately inserts its bill into the

loamy soil, is dissatisfied with the result; repeating the operation again and again, until it seems to find the desired spot, and sinks its bill the entire length to its very eyes. Not content with this, it lies flat on its breast with bill hidden from view, and contentedly remains there, its eyes blinking in the bright sun. This was something new to the young boy, he had never seen anything of the kind before, neither has he since. He kicked a dry stick, frightening the bird. Quick as a flash the woodcock sprung from its soft bed and started across the pond. Too late! A sharp report rung out on the still air, and the bird fell dead, making a gentle splash in the water, while tiny waves retreated from the fallen body.

The nexth month, August, we see this same lad, for he is but a lad, not yet fifteen, among the prairie chickens. His companion a youth about the same age, with them a pointer "Jewel," a dog old in years and experience, still untiring and never ceasing in her efforts to find the birds. She it was that taught those boys the most likely place for birds. They follow her with confidence, past experience having shown them she knows more of the birds than they. She it was that had taught them where to seek the birds morning, noon and evening.

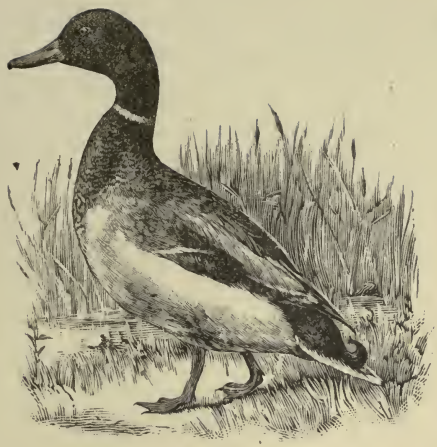
In the fall we see this youth among the ducks, taking advantage of their morning flight, finding them in their midday retreats, shooting them in the evening over decoys, or at some point as they go to their roosting-place stealthily sculling them along the banks of sloughs, bayous and in the running water. Or, tramping through the underbrush, and along the hillsides, after the whirring ruffed grouse.

Such were the experience and opportunities had by this youth before he attained the age of fifteen. Is it a surprise then that when a score of years had been added to his fifteen that he should love to recall the days of his youth, or that the inherited love of dogs and guns should still claim its strong hold on him?

These little scenes and incidents of boyhood are recited, the writer feeling that they will recall pleasant memories to the mind of the reader, and place him temporarily back, to the scenes of *his* childhood, that like Hood he will say:

"I remember, I remember,
The house where I was born,
The little window where the sun
Came peeping in at morn;
He never came too soon,
Nor brought too long a day;
But now, I often wish the nights
Had borne my breath away.

I remember, I remember,
The fir trees, dark and high,
I used to think their slender spires
Were close against the sky.
It was childish ignorance,
But now 'tis little joy
To know I'm farther off from heaven,
Than when I was a boy."



CHAPTER II.

MALLARD DUCK.

(*Anas Boschas.*)

'Tis said, that when once a Mallard chooses her mate
And death, or accident, destroys her lover,
She mourns her loss, submits to fate,
But during that year, chooses no other.

NOT a bird in the United States is more familiarly known than the Mallard. It is seen throughout the Western States and Territories, and the chief object of pursuit in wild fowl shooting. Their habits, resorts and the best methods to hunt them successfully are so fully treated of in other parts of this volume, that it would be like adding surplusage to an explanative treatise, were I to refer to them very fully here.

Their migration begins in early spring; indeed, before spring has actually come, they wend their flight

toward the far distant North, in flocks of from 20 to 100. Their flight is strong and regular, and their speed will average from 60 to 100 miles an hour. While their flight is early, from Southern climes and Southern waters, they are in no great haste to reach their objective point of destination, and they tarry on their journey through the Middle, Western, and Northern States. The approaching spring time, the warm, gentle rains, the bright, melting rays of the midday sun, soften the earth in frozen cornfields, melts the snows and causes torrents of water to swell long inactive streams; the low lands are submerged; the tall bottom grass is hidden beneath the fast rising flood; the water seeks the highest ridges, and then merrily ripples and gurgles as it flows along. At such places they drop in and rest, and feed before continuing their journey. On the pin oak ridges they best love to tarry, and with water just deep enough to wander over the ridges, half swimming, half wading, they flounder along, tipping up their plump bodies, as their glossy heads disappear beneath the water, searching for the anticipated acorn; or swim in pairs beneath tall trees whose water-covered roots they skim so lightly over. 'Tis in such places that a few weeks later their love-making begins, and the duck after looking with maidenly modesty among the handsome fellows she daily meets in the woods, picnicking beneath the forest trees of birch, willow, elm, oak and hickory, or swimming around through thickets of crab-apple trees, she consents to become the bride of one. This consent is published and known by their constantly being together, forsaking all others, and cleaving one unto the other. Their constancy is marvelous, and it is said that once they have chosen their mate

their affection is so strong that nothing but death separates them,—that even death itself does not alienate their love, but that the balance of the year is passed by the survivor in mourning for its lost love, and it chooses no other mate. This is an argument frequently used by advocates of the abolishment of spring duck shooting. I have often dreamily sat in the bottom of my boat, snugly in dry hay, hidden behind an improvised blind, and watched a pair of these handsome ducks as they drifted, floated or swam near me, entirely unconscious of the fact that an enemy was near. It was always a pretty sight to me to see them, so careless, so happy, feeding, chattering, or dreamily dozing within close gun shot. They would be constantly near one another and apparently at all times watchful lest they should become separated. First the drake would swim in advance, closely followed by his brown, yellow and mottled companion; then, the duck enticed to one side by acorns dropping with a "ker-plump" into the water, or sighting the tiny brown and red berries dropping into the flowing stream, or seeds upon its surface, would swim to them, thus temporarily deserting her lord and master. But he was not willing to be deserted, and would swim slowly after her retreating form, his handsome body combining so many beautiful colors, colors of lead, chestnut, black, gray and glossy green, varying in brilliancy and beauty as the sun's bright rays shone so brightly on him, as it straggled through overhanging trees. As the drake swims along nearing us, it seems that in his dark eye we see glistening there the affectionate love he has for his modest, dusky mate, and she, in her haste for the tempting food, has not forgotten her chosen mate, but turns her head of golden brown,

archly looks around, as if to say, "Are you coming? Are you coming?" He seems to interpret her inmost thoughts, rises on his feet, preens himself, and hastily swims, following her, while there issues from his velvet covered throat a low, vibrating "M-amph, M-amph," which causes the blood of the hunter to tingle with electric fervor. As some dark object passes between us and the sun, a flitting shadow is cast upon the water. Without moving our body our eyes are cast up, and we see a pair coming in, decoyed by those in the water. They seem to stand in the air, momentarily held up by their swift moving, fluttering wings. We hear the "whew" of their wings, as the slight breeze carries the sound to us, and slowly dropping, gracefully descending, sustained by their strong wings, they alight beside their friends, exchanging low chuckling greetings, and each pair swims off by themselves. At this time we notice what we have so often seen before,—the marked contrast between the male and female mallard, in both beauty and size. The male is larger, stronger, and endowed with more brilliant plumage.

The breeding place of the mallard, like all other water-fowl, is in the far North, and yet as the season advances from early to late, snow storms, rough weather, cold March winds, winds that have forgotten the time they were due, and with their noisy howl and dismal shrieking, convert what should be balmy April into a cold, disagreeable, almost wintry month. The cold winds and raw days, seem at times to unsettle the ducks, and they delay their departure from time to time until spring lapses into summer. Before this time they have discovered luxuriant feeding grounds, food in plenty, and solitary retreats in vast marshes of wild

rice. They have been there for perhaps weeks, undisturbed. Instinct prompts them to lay their eggs, to bring up their young; it also tells them they should go farther North, far beyond the possibility of human interference. But a few dislike leaving a place which they have become attached to,—so they make their nests, lay their eggs and rear their brood. This does not often happen, still it does once in a while. Late in May I have found their nests, and unintentionally routed off the mother bird. Once, while after prairie chickens, my dog drove into the water, from the tall grass at the edge of a large pond, the parent duck with her flock of half-grown youngsters. This was in this county on the first of August, years ago. The color, size and number of the eggs laid are same as tame ducks. The tame or domesticated ducks are descendents of these wild mallards. One can see a great similarity at a glance, and a person can select two ducks, one male and one female, from a flock of tame ones, and the most experienced duck shooter cannot tell the difference between the tame and wild ones.

After they have hatched their young in the far North, and time, practice, and experience have added strength and growth to their young bodies, they are ready to start out with the old ones, returning to their winter homes in the South. They follow the weather, that is, as the days grow cool and frost appears, they go but a slight distance, then stop, feed and rest. The desire to move along, the inherited love of wandering, induces some to move still farther forward. In this way the rivers, ponds and marshes are filled with them in the places where they are known to frequent. At times most ex-

cellent shooting may be had in a certain locality, while at other times in the same place, under apparently the same circumstances, no shooting will be found. This is explainable. The first time they found plenty of water and food; the second, they found neither; or, perhaps the water and no food. Mallards want plenty of water; they must have it and will have it. If they cannot find it in a place they are accustomed to frequent, they will seek other places and keep going until they do find it. This water they don't want to drink, but they want it to live in, to moisten up the soil, to soften the mud, so they can get at the acorns, to make rank rushes and rice roots, to cause a place where wild rice and berries and smart-weed can and will float on the surface, so they may swim through and among the rice stalks feeding as they go.

There is a marked difference in the flesh of mallards. This difference is noticeable among those killed in wooded places, where they feed on seeds, larvæ, and acorns, and those which feed exclusively in corn fields, —the latter are much finer eating, more juicy, and when ready for baking, their plump bodies present a golden appearance, precisely the color of the corn they had eaten. I do not wish to be understood as saying that those killed on timbered rivers are not fat and good eating, but they will not average as well in fatness as their corn-fed cousins. The plumpest, heaviest lot of mallards I ever saw were killed by a friend of mine and myself, while hunting in Western Iowa some years ago. We killed one hundred and thirty-six, and they were the handsomest lot of ducks I ever saw,—before or since. They were shot in the stubble and cornfields in Hamilton county. It was in the month of November;

they had been frolicking in wheat and cornfields, gorging themselves for six weeks.

The different methods of hunting mallards will be found throughout this book, under appropriate headings.

Anas Boschas: Bill, about the length of the head, higher than broad at the base, depressed and widened toward the end, rounded at the tip. Upper mandible, with a dorsal outline, sloping and a little concave; the ridge of the base broad and flat toward the end, broadly convex, as are the sides; the edges soft and rather obtuse; the marginal lamellæ transverse, 50 on each; the ungines oval, curved, abrupt at the end. Nasal groove elliptical, sub-basal, filled by the soft membrane of the bill; nostrils sub-basal, placed near the ridge, longitudinal, elliptical, pervious. Lower mandible, slightly curved upward with the angles very long, narrow and rather pointed; the lamellæ about sixty.

Head of moderate size, oblong, compressed; neck rather long and slender; body, full, depressed; feet short, stout, placed a little behind the centre of the body; legs bare a little above the joint; tarsus short, a little compressed anteriorly with scutilla, laterally and behind with small reticulated scales. Hind toe extremely small with a very narrow membrane; third toe longest; fourth a little shorter, but longer than the second, all the toes connected by reticulated membranes; the outer with a thick margin, the inner with a margin extended into a slightly lobed web. Claws small, arched, compressed, rather acute; that of the middle toe much longer with dilated, thin, inner edge.

Plumage, dense, soft, elastic; of the head and neck, short, blended and splendent; of the other parts in

general, broad and rounded. Wings of moderate length, acute; primaries narrow and tapering; the second longest, the first very little shorter, secondaries broad, curved inward, the inner elongated and tapering; tail short, much rounded, of sixteen acute feathers, of which the four central are recurved.

Bill, greenish yellow; iris, dark brown; feet, orange red; head and upper part of neck, deep green, a ring of white about the middle of the neck; lower part anteriorly and fore part of breast, dark brownish chestnut; fore part of back, light yellowish brown, tinged with gray, the rest of the back, brownish black; the rump, black, splendent, with green and purplish blue reflections, as on the recurved tail feathers. Upper surface of wings, grayish brown; the scapulars lighter, except the inner webs, and with anterior dorsal feathers, minutely undulated with brown. The speculum, or beauty spot, on about ten of the secondaries, is of a brilliant changing purple and green, edged with velvet, black and white; the anterior black and white being on the secondary coverts; breast, sides, and abdomen very pale gray, minutely undulated with darker; lower tail coverts black with blue reflections.

Length to end of tail, 24 inches; extent of wings 36; weight, from two and a half to three pounds.

Adult Female: Bill, black in the middle, dull orange at the extremities and along the edges; iris as in the male, as are the feet. The general color of the upper parts is pale yellowish brown streaked, and spotted with dusky brown; the feathers of the head are narrowly streaked; of the back with the margin and central streak yellowish brown, the rest of the scapulars similar, but with the light streak on the outer web. The

wings are nearly as in the male, the speculum similar, but with less green. The lower parts are dull olive, deeper on the lower neck, and spotted with brown.

Length, 22 inches; weight, from two pounds to two and one half.

CHAPTER III.

WOOD DUCK—SUMMER DUCK.

"Now Nature hangs her mantle green
On every blooming tree,
And spreads her sheets of daisies white
Out o'er the grassy lea."

THE Wood duck, or Summer duck, is the most beautiful in color and plumage of any of the duck species. The glossy brilliancy of the soft, dense feathers, the perfect blending of all the colors,—completing all imaginable shades,—makes the Summer duck one of indescribable beauty. We have all, time and again, seen sights, that were impressed so deeply upon our minds, that time could not blot them out; still, the beautiful images carved in our memories, standing in relief, like a cameo, emblazoned on our minds, we could not impart to others; we knew they were there, we constantly see them, and yet the words at our command are inadequate to tell of the hidden splendor we see so clearly, yet cannot describe. So one feels, when he attempts to paint with words, the brilliant plumage of the summer duck. There is not a bird that visits the North in field, forest or stream, that can compare with this one, in magnificent coloring. They are rightly named Summer duck, they are so different from all others. We are apt to associate ducks, and perhaps correctly too, with cold and inclement weather, and when we have the one we anticipate the other. But

the Summer ducks, come in mild weather, stay with us, breed and bring up their young along running creeks, where alders and maples, willows and birch bend fraternally toward each other across some babbling brook, their topmost limbs intertwining affectionately, exchanging friendly greetings with each other, as the night and day winds of summer cause them to gently rub together.

Such are the places these pretty birds frequent, and bring up their young. They love to swim in the shallow water, male and female together, surrounded by tiny forms of yellow,—their young, all busily engaged in nipping tender buds, picking up seeds, or chasing some fat bug as it twinkles on the water. How happy they are in such places! Swimming at the side and under overhanging banks, that seem like huge bluffs in comparison with their diminutive bodies, turning their little heads sidewise as they watch a fly or grasshopper, as it clings to some waving blade of grass, just on the brink of the shore, or watching it with still greater interest, as it flies or jumps so quickly down on some moss-covered stone,—their little stomachs craving the delicacy, while their father and mother watch them with pride and solicitous interest. Then to see them when a fly or bug drops into the water; the whole flock scramble for it in haste, pell-mell, the fortunate one gulps it down, fearing no indigestion, while the others, foiled, but not discouraged, swim along more determined than before. When they reach some old sunken log, its black body anchored in the shallow water, the little ones discover a perfect horde of bugs floating at its edge. The mother clambers on to the log, and basking in the sunshine, preens herself, stands up to her

extreme height, then on her tip-toes, rapidly flits her wings to sustain her body, while the sun shines warmly and brightly on her, bringing plainly to view the golden red and purple of her wings, her dusky head shaded with green, the pure white of her dainty throat, and the yellow and mottled brown of her body. We admire her beauty,—and yet, when we look at her mate, as he swims about in the shadow of the trees, then emerging into the open and unobstructed light, the beauty of the female is made feeble by the comparison. He looks at his mate admiringly, as she sits on the log, her bright eyes constantly watching with maternal care the young brood at her feet. The male constantly calls with plaintive cry "Whee—Whee," commencing in a modulated quivering tone, and ending about four notes higher, dwelling on and prolonging the last note. Such a mellow call it is, so sweet and full of solicitude. Its plaintiveness has often reminded me of the mournful cry of the turtle dove.

> "Sweet bird that shunn'st the noise of folly,
> Most musical, most melancholy."

The drake, noticing the handsome coloring on the reflected feathers of his quiet mate as she sits so contentedly in the bright sunshine, while not jealous of his spouse, at the same time, thinks he too is clothed in gaudy raiment. Suddenly he springs up, and alights on the outstretched limb of an old dead tree, whose trunk is whitened with age and the action of the elements. How strange he seems up so high! resting contentedly and at home on the limb. He appears out of place, sitting so complacently in the tree, and yet, he is doing nothing uncommon, nothing unusual; for

not only do he and his mate alight in trees, but they often build their nests in its crotches, and raise their young until strong enough to partially care for themselves. It looks odd to see them in trees; about as strange and out of place, as would a turkey or chicken be swimming in the water. As the drake alights on the tree, he settles in the full light of the midday summer's sun; the warm winds play through grass and trees; pond-lilies, in snowy whiteness or in yellow bonnets, nod gently in response to the breeze, as it moves so quietly over the rippling water, carrying to the secreted hunter delicate and sensuous perfumes. The drake gazes intently in the distance, as if his sharp eyes could penetrate woods and fields, and furtively looks around, as if anticipating the approach of an enemy. He sees nothing to alarm him, hears nothing but the faint tinkle of a bell, emitting its irregular and not unmusical sound as the bell-cow walks slowly along, grazing on the bottom-grass. He bends his head gracefully, and looks down on his mate and their progeny. Each turn of his head, every movement of his body, discloses some new brilliancy of plumage, and he appears like a tropical bird, strayed from palmettoes and fig-trees, and lost amid the woods of the North. It seems to us that such as he would feel lost, in a climate like ours, even in midsummer, for never in Northern woods has his equal in beauty been seen. Looking at him as he sits there, we wonder if he really knows how exceedingly handsome he is; his clean-cut head, making a perfect outline against the blue sky; his bright, sparkling eyes enclosed with lids of deepest carmine; the long tuft descending from the back of his head, and floating in a graceful plume down his neck; the upper part of his head be-

tween the eye and bill a deep green,—so gorgeous in the sun's bright rays that it looks highly polished and seems to cast off sparks of variegated colors, as it merges into purple and runs down his neck, exposing a throat of purest whiteness. Then we notice his back of reddish brown; the rump of similar color tinged with green; then greenish black, and then his plumage runs from dense black to purest white, combining all the coloring imaginable, and adding to these tinges light and dark shades, and reflected shadows that are simply indescribable,—I have often looked at a rainbow, with all the perfect and beautiful colors known to Nature, and yet it seems to me that a Summer duck has them all. Has the reader ever seen the Summer ducks at home raising their broods? If you have, and studied them unseen, or unheard, watching them in their wild freedom, showing their peculiar traits, tenderly guarding their young on a summer's afternoon, while you lay full length in the grass, securely hidden, watching with growing interest each movement, entranced by the scene, completely carried away with the changing beauty, and the brilliant plumage of the birds, you will know why I admire the Summer duck.

Their flight through the woods is very swift, and at dusk they move from place to place, darting rapidly among the trees. In marshy places, they are found in little open spots, around brush piles and muskrat houses. They are good eating, but afford me the more pleasure seeing them in the woods, and I never shoot them unless there are no other ducks to be found.

The Wood Duck or Summer Duck; *Adult Male* :— Bill, shorter than the head, deeper than broad at the base, depressed toward the end, slightly narrowed to-

ward the middle of the ungines, the frontal angles prolonged and pointed.

Head of moderate size. Neck, rather long and slender. Body, full and depressed. Wings, rather small. Feet, very short, strong, placed rather far back; tarsus, very short, considerably depressed.

Plumage, dense, soft, blended, generally glossed. Feathers of the middle of the head and upper part of the hind neck, very narrow, elongated, and uncurved; of the rest of the head and upper part of the neck very short; of the back and lower parts in general broad and rounded, excepting on the shoulder before the wings, where they are enlarged, very broad and abrupt. Wings, of moderate length, narrow and acute. Tail of moderate length, rather broad, much rounded, of sixteen round feathers.

Upper mandible, bright red at the base, yellowish at the sides; the intermediate space along the ridge and the ungines, black, as in the lower mandible and its membranes. Iris and edges of eyelids, bright red. Feet dull orange; claws black; upper part of the head and space between the bill and the eye, deep green and highly glossed; below the latter space a patch of dark purple and a larger one of the same color, but lighter behind the eye; side of the neck, its hind part under the crest and the middle all round very dark purple. Throat, for more than three inches, pure white, with a process on each side a little beyond the eye, and another nearly half way down the throat. Sides of the neck and its lower part anteriorly, reddish purple, each feather over the latter with a triangular white tip. Middle of the neck behind, back, and rump, very dark reddish brown; the latter deeper and tinged with

green. Upper tail coverts and tail, greenish black. Some of the lateral tail coverts, dull reddish purple; a few on either side with their filaments light red. Smaller wind coverts, alula, and primaries dull grayish brown. Most of the latter with part of their outer web grayish white, and their inner, toward the tip, darker and glossed with green. Secondary quills tipped with white; the outer webs green, with purple reflections. Those of the inner secondaries and scapulars velvet-black, their inner webs glossed and changing to green. The broad feathers anterior to the wings are white, terminated with black. Breast and abdomen, grayish white feathers, under the wings yellowish gray, minutely undulated with black and white bars. Lower wing coverts and axillary feathers, white barred with grayish brown. Lower tail coverts dull grayish brown. Length, to end of tail, 20 1-2 inches; extent of wings, 28.

Adult Female: The female is considerably smaller, and differs greatly from the male in coloring. The feathers of the head are not elongated, but those of the upper part of the neck are slightly so. In other respects the plumage presents nothing very remarkable and is similar to that of the male. Bill, blackish brown. Feet, dusky, tinged with yellow. Upper part of the head, dusky, glossed with green. Sides of the head and neck, and the hind part of the latter, light brownish gray. Throat, white, but without the lateral processes of the male. Fore part of the neck below, and sides, light yellowish brown, mottled with grayish brown, as are the sides under the wings. Breast and abdomen, white, the former spotted with brown. Hind neck, back, and rump dark brown, glossed with green and purple. Wings as in male, but the speculum less, and

the secondaries externally faint reddish purple; the velvety black of the male diminished to a few narrow markings. Tail, dark brown, glossed with green. Length 19, 1-2 inches.

CHAPTER IV.

BLUE-WINGED TEAL.

(*Anas Discors.*)

THE Blue-Winged Teal is among the swiftest and sprightliest of the duck species. They afford delightful sport to the hunter, for they are always with us at a time when early fall commences to tinge forest and field with its autumn colorings. They are gentle, confiding little things, and live, travel and associate together in the greatest harmony. They are great lovers of warm sunshine, and can be seen sitting on the shore, on muskrat houses and small elevations of almost any kind dozing and basking in the sun. Active little fellows when feeding; they wade through shallow water, skimming bugs and larvæ from the surface, or hastily gulp down a venturesome insect that indiscreetly gets near them. Unlike the larger variety of ducks, they avoid open water and content themselves huddling together on the soft

muddy shore, or enjoying a constant holiday among the pond-lilies, flags, and wild rice.

They are easily decoyed, easily approached, and easily killed. Shooting them over points they will come like a flash, sometimes in immense droves, flying low and with incredible swiftness, no sailing or circling around for them, with heads pointed for some feeding spot they come swift as thought, and quickly flirting their little bodies first one side, then the other, drop right in among the decoys, often within twenty feet of the hunter. They appear to have perfect control of themselves when flying, and will alight square into rice spots or water, when going at their greatest speed, pitching down very similarly to a snipe or woodcock. An idea of the great speed with which they fly may be had from this apt illustration, given by one who evidently has had large experience with them:

"Let a blue-winged teal get it into his head that he is a little late to hit an appointment, or that 'he wants to see a man' a longish bit away, and a hundred miles an hour is decidedly too slow to meet his notion. A streak of lightning, well greased, is now hardly an exaggerated simile, and after an astonished glimpse of a dark spot swims above your head like an unlighted meteor, you are ready to believe that if he were going straight away from the muzzle of your gun, and the shot following a half second later, it would be about an even race with odds in favor of the bird, if anything."

At such times, when they are going at a speed of from one to two hundred miles an hour, there is no time for dallying on aim but the shooter should hold as near as possible (the bird being estimated at 35 to 40 yards) 10 to 15 feet ahead of it. Should the bird fly over his

head, going directly away, better save his shell; still, if he wants to experiment, he might try. Possibly the bird will slack its speed and give the shot a chance to catch up; this being an event of so much uncertainty, he had better not risk it, unless supplied with plenty of shells. Being engaged in feeding, they pay but little attention to the hunter, and rush along gulping down their food as if their lives depended on its being done hastily.

It takes but a slight blow to kill them, and large numbers are frequently killed at the discharge of both barrels. Feeding almost continuously, they are always in excellent condition, tender, juicy, and all that one could desire for the table. After one has been killed and dressed for cooking should the discovery be made that his ribs are not larded with at least a quarter of an inch of fat, depend on it, he merited death, for he was during life a sloth.

No. 7 or 8 shot is the proper size.

Anas Discors.—This species measures about 14 inches in length, and 22 inches in extent. The bill is long in proportion, and of a dusky slate; the front and upper part of the head, black; from the eye to the chin is a large crescent of white; the rest of the head and half of the neck are of a dark slate, richly glossed with green and violet; remainder of the neck and breast black or dusky, thickly marked with semi-circles of brownish white, elegantly intersecting with each other; belly, pale brown, barred with dusky narrow lines; sides and vent the same tint spotted with oval marks of dusky;

flanks elegantly waved with large semi-circles of pale brown ; sides of the vent, pure white ; under tail coverts black ; back, deep brown with black, each feather waved with large semi-ovals of brownish white ; lesser wing coverts, a bright blue ; primaries, dusky brown ; secondaries, black ; speculum or beauty spot, rich green ; tertials, edged with black or light blue and streaked down their middle with white ; the tail, which is pointed, extends two inches beyond the wings ; legs and feet, yellow, the latter very small ; the two crescents of white before the eyes meet on the throat.

The female differs in having the head and neck of a dull dusky slate, instead of the rich violet of the male ; the hind of head is also whitish ; the wavings of the back and lower parts more indistinct.

Wing nearly the same in both.

CHAPTER V.

SHOOTING MALLARDS FROM A SCULL BOAT. (ON THE MISSISSIPPI.)

If thou would'st enjoy sport, such as thou hast never
Seen or dreamt of, then be my guest, if but for a day.

ONE of the most successful ways of shooting wild fowl on the Mississippi River is from a scull boat. It is rare sport, and enjoyed by comparatively few, especially when one takes into consideration the number who hunt these birds, and the various means they employ to hunt with any degree of success. It has always been to me a matter of great surprise, that more sportsmen have not hunted in this manner. Experienced duck hunters—men who have passed their entire lives among the aquatic tribe, who are versed in, and filled to completion with duck lore, who know their instincts, habits, breeding places, and resorts, and who can almost read them in mid-air, forming instantaneously a correct opinion as to where they are flying and what may be their intentions; men who know how to hunt them morning, midday and evening, spring and fall; amid the willows, among the tall oaks, hidden in the marsh securely from view, by the tall waving and nodding wild rice, shooting them from out-jutting points, under their line of light, seductively coaxing them from their high flight, with plaintive call and deceitful decoys, knocking them right and left, as they circle over the yellow and golden field;

of corn, or killing them in mid winter, as they come into the air-holes covered with decoys and tempting bait. And still, these men with all their experience have never hunted them from a sculling boat.

Duck hunting is no childish sport. When mild, pleasant weather, gentle, soothing winds, gurgling, murmuring brooks, sweet-smelling, delicate, fragrant flowers invite us out for a day to the woods or beside the streams, where in indolence we lie, half waking, then lulled into a lazy slumber by the sighing winds, or warbling thrush, or kept awake by the cawing crow, as it flies over our heads in its accustomed straight line, or the laughing jay, as it teeters on the tip of some tall tree, industriously yelling at us because of our intrusion, —such scenes as these we all recall. They are bright spots, oases in the desert of our lives.

But the duck season, as the reader well knows, is not at such a time, but entirely the opposite. It seems as if at such times, the elements combine to disgust and discourage the hunter. And yet, a person experiences so many pleasant days while duck shooting, that it seems as though the elements have been so impartial, that we are not justified in complaining. It is but natural then, having to hunt at a time of the year when we can but expect cold and inclement weather, we should lighten our burdens when possible, and accept the advantage where offered.

And now I want you, my reader, to go with me for but a day. A day isn't long in your life of years. You can readily recall not one, but many passed with Nature. Grant me your time and presence but for a brief day, and together we will go, and you shall see much that will be new to you. You shall see how ducks

are killed from a scull boat. You promise to go. Your gun is a 10 ga., weighing 10 lbs. Leave all to me; you are to be my guest for the occasion, and I propose to treat you as a distinguished one, choosing to provide all the necessaries for the trip, and promising you a very pleasant one, should the weather be auspicious. We will use the same shells, loaded 4 1-2 dms. powder, well wadded, and 1 1–8 ozs. No. 6 shot; but I shall put into our box plenty of No. 8's,—for should the ducks decoy well, the shells will come handy, in fact, just the size; while if they are wild, the 8's will do nicely for cripples. Bring your hip rubber boots with you; they may be needed, not that I think they will be, as the boat will be perfectly dry, plenty of hay in the bottom, and loose fitting shoes, or felt boots will be warmer, and much more comfortable. You can throw your long boots under the bow, and should it so happen, as it frequently does, that we run across some pond, overflowed place, or bayou, where ducks are feeding, we will want them to retrieve our birds.

Yes! I don't doubt it; am willing to admit he is an excellent retriever. Still, we don't want your dog along, for our shooting will be almost, if not entirely, from the boat, and he would simply be in the way. Better lose a few ducks, than to have him wet and muddy constantly climbing in on the dry hay, splashing mud over ourselves and guns, and disarranging, or perhaps completely knocking, our blind from off the bow. I don't doubt but it seems strange to you to hunt ducks without a dog, but rest assured, it's the correct way in scull boat shooting, as your experience will prove before our return. My sack of mallard decoys we will throw on the bow when we start out.

Don't know as we will need them—may be not; really don't think we will, but on the bow, in an old dirty coffee-sack, they are not conspicuous; and if noticed at all, have the grim appearance of the butt of an old log, or decayed stump, and they serve in no small degree as a blind. I would as soon think of going on a trip from home without change of collars and cuffs, as to think of going hunting in my scull boat without decoys. They are to me as much a part of my outfit, as my boots, coat, indeed, as anything, except my gun.

Early the next morning we start by train, going up the Mississippi from Clinton, 18 or 20 miles. Through the courtesy of the conductor, our boat and luggage is carried in the baggage car, and we are put off the train midway between stations, at the point requested. The train moves swiftly along, and you and I are on the banks of the Mississippi, whose swift flowing current runs so quietly at our feet.

The day is an ideal one. Had we power to have selected it, our choice would have been just such a day. 'Tis fall; and the frequent rains in the North have overflowed the Black, the Wisconsin, the Chippewa, and numerous small rivers all pouring vast floods into the Father of Waters. The river has steadily risen. Sandbars are covered; lowlands submerged. The narrow channels have been filled, until, between the marked shores, distinct by the aid of tall trees and overhanging willows, the eye beholds one vast sea of water. Notice the boat at our feet! no skiff, no float, no punt, but the graceful elegance of her outline attracts your admiration at once. If I have pride in her appearance, it is a pardonable one, for she is new; only

a year old. And in her construction I tried to avoid the faults and imperfections noticed in others, for years. See how lightly and airily she sits on the water, rising and falling by the motion of the slight waves. The bow at first may not impress you favorably, your mind will revert to your yachting, "when the sharp prow of your yacht clove the water like a knife." Very true; and you may not like the sled-runner shape of the bow. Wait until, gently propelled with the sculling oar, she glides over floating sticks and other debris, then you will see, instead of shoving it ahead in a surging, bubbling mass, she quietly slides over it without effort or noise. Look at her sides; so smooth that not the slightest ripple will be made as we pass along, and that gentle sloping stern slips through the water, leaving the smallest of wakes as she passes. The oars are bound with leather where they touch the locks. As if that were not enough to insure quietness, the locks are covered with heavy leather; the sculling oar, where it comes in contact with the boat is also covered.

We are in the boat. Sit on my shell box, it will answer a double purpose; and this is one of them. You will have but slight rowing. I shall do most of the work to-day, and you most of the shooting. You are an admirer of the beautiful, enjoy pretty scenery, and Nature in her varied and changeable garb. You smile incredulously, as if to ask me how I know it. If I am wrong, why do you gaze so intently over my head, and back of me, at the deep, unbroken bluffs, whose solid walls extend so high toward the heavens; or on their heights, where immense oaks stretch out their gigantic arms to the four points of the compass; at their neighbors, the strong hickory, whose variegated

leaves tremble in the morning air, and at the dwarfish evergreens that peep out from the deep caverns on these huge bluffs, where the moss in green and gold clings to the rough-faced rocks. *Vultus est index animi.* (The face is the index of the mind.) This is clearly shown in your looks—your bright eye, thoughtful expression, and deep, meaning smile.

Put up your oars. We will land on this island, and fix our boat. We are at the head of "Dark Shute," looking to the south. "Dark Shute" is at our right, the main river at our left. Formerly "Dark Shute" was the channel proper, but of late years it is changed, and is on the east side of the island. It derived its name from the deep darkness which at night is reflected from the high bluffs you were admiring. Let me fix the blind on the boat. All right! you may help me. Bring those old, decayed chunks of wood. We will trim the bow first. Short pieces. Now you see the decoy sack comes handy, it helps fill out. Watch how I put these sticks on. They must present the appearance when completed of an old log, with up-turned root, or floating brush pile,—something that ducks daily see in running water. Scatter over the blind slender twigs, putting some up straight, as if the stump had sprouted. Not too high, or they will interfere with your shooting. Now let us step back, and see what kind of architects we are. Pretty good! But those overhanging twigs won't do; they must be kept out of the water, as they will make ripples, and you know floating logs and brush never do. There, that's it! that will do. On the sides we will lay a few long sticks. Put the oars in the boat, there, at the side; we won't want them till night. It's down stream work,

and the current will carry us, when I am tired of sculling.

There! now she's all right. I never trim a boat for sculling without thinking of my shooting companion and old friend, Ben Woodward. He is the most particular man I ever saw; and the best sculler. After trimming the boat he always made some excuse to walk toward the woods. Usually, to get a little more plunder, but really, to see how the blind would look from a distance. He would examine it critically; as carefully as a woman does her hair before going into a reception room; and then, if it suited him, it was a smart duck that he couldn't scull. Get in the bow and turn your back to me. Those little places along the side are made to put shells in. Fill them up. Have plenty handy. They won't spoil if you have all those racks full; besides, I am liable to call on you for some. She doesn't loom up much, does she? Only about three inches, not counting the four inch combing that hides us. You thought that a large place decked over on the bow? Apparently it is, about four feet; still it's essential to make a good blind.

We are now right in a splendid duck country. Pardon the plainness of my speech, but it is absolutely necessary not to talk, and you must keep your eyes open and your mouth shut. Consider yourself at liberty to speak when spoken to, but be assured you will have plenty of time for reflection. Shove that shell-box out of your way and sit on the bottom on the hay. On ducks on the water give them the first barrel, the other when they rise. Don't wait for me, they won't get away without hearing from me. This is a likely spot for them in these young willows. Mark

at your left, down about 80 yards. Didn't you see him? I did, a drake swimming at the edge of the brush, right at the foot of that old tree. I just caught a glimpse of the white on his rump. Watch for him. There! There! Good enough; he never winked after you fired; he is as dead as a mackerel. Look out! Give it to her! Well! Well! It took three shots to get her, but better that than three misses. You undershot her as she rose over the trees, and I missed her clean with the first barrel. Pick up that drake as we pass. No! No! not that way, not by the feet or wing; if you do, the water will be carried into the boat. Always pick them up by the bill, give them a couple of jerks up and down; that will shake the water off. Here's our duck, pick her up. I noticed four light in the stream below us. The stream is narrow and crooked, and we ought to get at them. Keep down, and when I give you a slight push, rise quickly to a sitting position and let them have it over the left quarter of the bow; they will be there, for with a quick turn of the oar I will turn the boat so as to make it so. Try and get in your first barrel very quick, for remember, there will be three waiting to follow. Be careful, and shoot clear of the blind. I have had companions in their excitement bang away into the blind, and even in their haste fire into the sack of decoys. There they are out in that opening! See how contentedly they sit! Look at that drake preen himself! We will get a shot sure, they are not the least suspicious. Where would we be with a common skiff? Simply left: they would have both seen and heard us long ago. Hug close to the bottom of the boat, until I push you. That's right! That's right! Hurrah! Got the whole four at one time. I thought

they would fly without giving us a shot. One of the ducks got uneasy and swam with her head a little too high to please me. Only three? Most certainly there were four! We downed them all. Aha! 'cute, isn't she? See how she sneaks off, body buried beneath the water and just her bill and top of head exposed. I'll give her a dose of those 8's that will resurrect her. I thought so! Get these first, then we will pick her up as we pass down.

Those tall trees off to the east are on the border of quite a lake, a great resort for blue-bills and red-heads. We will work over that way, for I know that on the high pin-oak ridges, where the water must be from 10 inches to two feet deep, we will find large numbers of mallards—unless other hunters have been there before us, and they haven't, or we would have heard them shooting. Just beyond the trees and north of the lake there is high grass and smart-weed, and growing there in immense quantities is a red or brown berry that floats on the surface of the water, and is skimmed off by the ducks, as they glide around through the tangled meshes, half swimming, half wading. Did I hear it? Most certainly I did; not only that one, but many others. It is their quacking off in the feeding ground I spoke of. Down among those large trees we can see them swimming now. No use trying to scull them. They know that in the shallow dead water where they are, nothing floats, nothing moves; besides, beneath the surface of the water are hidden stumps and logs that one's boat would ground on, and we would be seen. Better let these go. See how they are moving in the air, coming from the South; all kinds, mallards, blue-bills, red-heads; and there darting swiftly through

the trees, goes a flock of blue-winged teal. Look out; right in front of you, a pair of mallards. Try and get them both, draw on the drake, then the duck. Two deep reports, and both are dead, almost at our feet. What a sight! The loud report of the gun roars, echoes, and reverberates, through the deep woods, and from their depths spring up mallards in almost countless numbers. We see them indistinctly through the timber; first, just off the water, the bright spot on their tails conspicuous by its purple surroundings, then we catch faint glimpses of them through the dense trees; and last, set out by the strong light of the clear sky, we behold them rising above the tree tops. What a noise they make; so slight at first, at the start a faint "Whew," —then a loud flapping of strong wings, until all merges into a deep roaring, like distant rolling thunder.

We scull around the small peninsula, and go through the long grass and scatter dead grass over the bow and sides of the boat, that it may correspond with the surroundings. The ducks return to feed; we kill them, singly, in pairs, make difficult and seemingly impossible shots, then with both barrels, score clean misses at one almost in our face. Thus the time passes quickly away. The flight ceases. Our constant shooting has driven them away. The dead are picked up. A nice bunch they are, fully twenty and all mallards. A pleased smile is noticed on your face, as you seat yourself again in the boat. Down the little bay we go; the light northwest wind slightly stirs the smooth water, causing it to upheave many ripples. Out in the center of the bay a small flock of blue-bills are unsuspectingly floating on the water. When from the fringed and willowy shore we emerge silently, noiselessly, they arise in dire alarm.

Too late ! The leaden hail has cut them down mercilessly. They are on the water. One of the flock misses its mate, forgets its cause of alarm, and quickly returns with wings curved down. A quick report, a dull splash, as the feathers idly drift with the wind, and he, too, is dead. A single green-winged teal darts past us. We hastily bring up our guns, laugh at each other, and take them down. Our thoughts are identical. Each feeling, that at the speed it was flying, the odds would be in favor of the duck beating the shot in an even race.

On a high ridge we stop for dinner. We drag from out the covered bow an old four-quart tin bucket, dirty and smutty with the smoke of many fires. We suspend it from one forked green stick hanging on two others. The snapping fire soon fills the air with escaping aroma, and we eat, drink, and are happy.

You chide me because I refuse your proffered cigar. As you light its mate and liesurely throw yourself down, on the soft leaf covered ground, tell me how you enjoy it, and what a solace it is to you. My moustache conceals a quiet smile that plays around my mouth, and my thoughts revert to a place, where, at noon and eventide, on returning from my office, two little darlings watch for me at the window, and when the door is opened spring into my arms, twining their soft arms tenderly around my neck ; the eldest saying, between resounding kisses, " I love you, papa dear, and love to kiss you, 'cause you don't 'moke ! " while the sweet blue eyes of the younger, look appealingly at me as she exclaims, " And My loves papa too ! "

Thou art blessed with eyes of deepest blue,
Compared with which, the sky assumes a paler hue;
Thou art my angels, with thy flaxen hair,
My pets, my darlings waiting for me there.

Hiding, peeping, behind the half open door,
Waiting to kiss me, once, twice or more,
Never forgetting at the hour of noon,
That thy father will return from his office soon.

Dropping dolls, and playthings, where'ere you be,
Hastening to the window, watching for me;
"Let's run and meet him, you and I,
See who gets there soonest, Mamie or My."

"Who gets there first, *she* shall have this,
The *longest* and the *sweetest* kiss;"
The choicest blessings of Heaven, on thee I invoke,
And smile, at childhood's reason for loving papa,
"'Cause he doesn't 'moke."

You have your solace? so have I.—I trust we all have. We start again, and thread our way over the over-flowed land. A splash startles us! Looking for the cause, we see a muskrat, more scared than we, swimming away from us for dear life. The glimmer of light through the trees tells us of a large body of water. We start for it. The trees stand closely together. With oars we could never get through them; propelled from the stern the boat rushes forward. You hold your breath, expecting to see the blind knocked off the bow, or brace yourself, anticipating a crash. You think it hardly possible to go through the place headed for. The bow is within a foot of the tree; you close your teeth firmly together, shut your eyes involuntarily. With a quick movement of the sculling oar, aided by the slight current, the boat glides quietly between the two trees, not even grazing them, and you can hardly believe your senses, as you notice there wasn't an inch to spare on either side. We reach the opening. It is the river. We rest for a few moments, drifting with the current. Down at our right, nestled closely together, are many small islands, clinging to the Iowa shore, at the mouth of Elk River. That small house at our left, on

the shore of that quiet bay, is the home of Johnson, the fisherman. Often, in passing the place in the dim twilight, those huge reels on which you see the nets are set out against the sky so dimly, that a very feeble stretch of the imagination brings before me, a Don Quixote and some Rozinante charging these windmill looking reels ; and I can see him repulsed, by the impetuosity of his charge, unhorsed, but not discouraged. This island just below us is the dividing point the head of Illinois slough. The slough winds its narrow length, serpentine like, and empties into the Mississippi fully twelve miles below.

We will go down the river ! The continuous banging we now hear will drive the ducks into the river, or on the islands in the river, where the hunter with muzzle-loader, zulu, and black hat won't bother them. Certainly ! I noticed them some time ago. They must be holding some kind of a convention, there is such a big raft of them right in the channel. Down they go ! Those were red-heads ! Could tell by the way they lit. No circling, no flying around ; they flew straight and struck the water. The force of their flight sliding them along like a boy on ice. Look at those pin-tails ! They drop as if from the clouds. Those mallards ; how they circle, and then, when ready to light, flutter over the place picked out as if in doubt. See the blue-bills dart in with a swish ! Pretty good ! That flock of blue-winged teal pass them by contemptuously, in spite of the frequent calls. Dainty little fellows ! They are bound for some mud-bank or rice-bed. We will hug this bank until the current brings them opposite, or nearly so; then, holding the bow a little up stream, will gradually work out and they will drift

down to us. We will take the lower end of the flock. 'Tis true they are not so thick as above, or in the middle, but it's necessary to always keep the bow toward them, and not expose the sides, or we would be seen. Keep low! they are working this way! I won't try to scull against this current, but will make her hold her own. Sh— careful! They are about fifty yards from us, and a single canvas-back among them. Leave him for me. Confound it! A prying blue-bill has swam around us. He sees us; he has his neck stretched up, and will alarm the whole flock. Rise quietly and fire! Watch your cripples! Kill them at once or they will get away. Six? I thought we had seven down; but then the fluttering of the dying and the wounded trying to escape might have made me miscount. Take a good look now you have them together, and you will notice the bill of a red-head is concave and blue; while that of the canvas-back is black and wedge shaped. That narrow opening we see over on the Iowa shore, is called "Hole in the Wall," an appropriate, if not elegant name. The water there is very deep. It is the steamboat channel. It gets its name from its pocket-like appearance, cutting in from the wide river to the abrupt bottom land behind it. The islands seem close together, and they are; still, far enough apart to make an excellent channel. We will go to the east and through the tall timber. We will find ducks everywhere to-day. This place is new to you; not to me. Those tall trees are old friends of mine. Eighteen years ago, when a boy, I wandered beneath those huge limbs. They look the same now as then; they don't seem to have grown a particle in size. Down their strong bodies the furrowed lines are running, the same

as then; at that time, I used to stand, gazing up to them in silent adoration, and wonder if those lines were lines of care, or the effects of wintry winds, or old age. See! how the frost-tipped leaves tremble, as the slight breeze causes the outward limbs to bend to you and me. They are their silent sentinels welcoming us to their quiet home. Do you suppose they know me? They surely ought to; for they see me every year, sometimes semi-annually, often weekly. That old hickory ought to remember me; for I once killed a fox squirrel, in its highest crotch; and this great oak tree too; for years ago, I shot on that gnarled limb, straight from its body, a large white owl, as it sat, half asleep, half awake, blinking in the mid-day sun. When I get among these trees, my spirit prompts me to say:

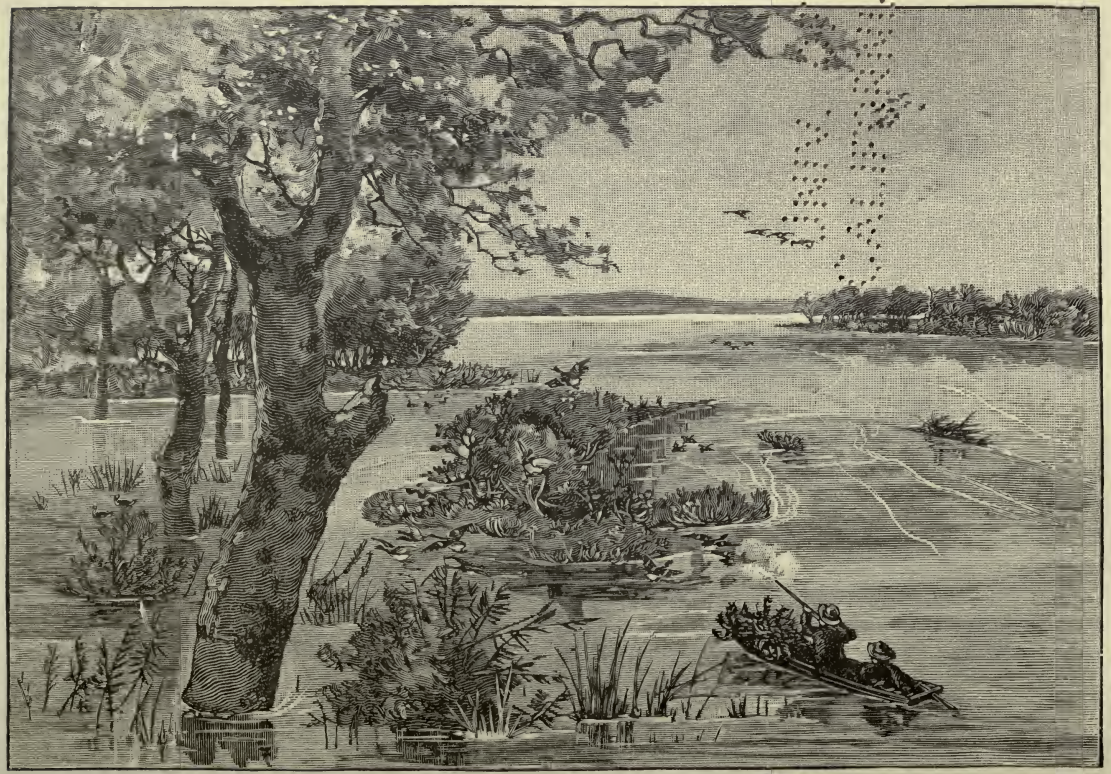
"Trees of the forest and open field,
Have you no sense of being? Does the air,
The pure air, which I breathe with gladness, pass
In gushes o'er your delicate lungs, your leaves
All unenjoyed? When on your wintry sleep the sun
Shines warm, have ye no dreams of spring?
And when the glorious springtime comes at last,
Have ye no joy of all your bursting buds,
And fragrant blooms, and melody of birds?"

'Tis now the middle of the afternoon, and the shortening day warns us to move on. The silent trees we were admiring, fade from view, hidden by the low birch, willows, and maple we are now passing through. We are in the low lands; and seem at times, to brush through the lower limbs of the trees as we glide along. Ducks are now jumping up all round us. From beneath the branches of the birch and from behind the maple, while the willow flashes appear to be full of them. It is not difficult to kill them now, and we improve the opportunity.

It is like going from darkness into day-light, when we suddenly, and to you unexpectedly, come out of the deep woods into the broad water of Rice Lake. There are hunters before us. We see their decoys, and cheerily greeting them, leave the most noted resort of the whole trip in the possession of strangers. Why care we? just below us is Turkey Slough, where from time immemorial, year in and year out, ducks have been killed by the hundreds. The day is fast disappearing. We place out our decoys in a likely place, and kill the ducks in that manner. At times, a pair or a single one alights just out of reach. Silently and stealthily we emerge from our hiding place and the floating brush pile is transformed into a fiery mass; and we gather the dead, and once more seek the protecting willows.

Thus the day slips along. Ducks come in at night by thousands, the constant booming of guns does not drive them away. On the contrary, it seems to act as a signal, pointing out to the stragglers where the majority are. Satiated with decoy shooting, we scull along the banks, the willows, in the shallow water, the submerged ground, the grassy knolls where seeds are found, the little patches of smart-weed ridges, where the acorns are dropping into the water with a sullen "plunk," and then, into the broad deep water,—securing game everywhere.

You feel tired? Indeed! Lay your gun listlessly down, and declare you won't fire another shot! no matter what comes along! You bring your hand to your eyes, wishing for a moment to shut out the sight of constant flying ducks, that *will* come before you. "Ah—unk! Ah—unk!" At this well-known sound,



SHOOTING MALLARDS FROM A SCULL BOAT ON THE MISSISSIPPI

your gun is grabbed quick as thought, you draw yourself closely down in the bottom of the boat, and scarcely breathe. It's all right! He hasn't seen you; but comes slowly along, his great gray body, conspicuous in the light of the setting sun. Steadily and regularly, his wide wings work up and down. He's over you! Coolly and calmly you rise to a sitting position. You draw aim on that black head, so plainly marked with a broad band of white; fire! and with a last expiring "honk," a Canada goose lies dead before you. A thrilling sense of pleasure darts through you; the tired feeling is gone. You are filled with new vigor; for you feel that at the last moment, at the opportune time, you have crowned a perfect day's sport with the most longed-for dessert.

The sun has gone down, the twilight is beginning to appear in the East; the shooting has ceased, the sky is brilliantly reflected in the west by the slow retreating sun; then it grows dim, a gray film spreads all around us. We start for home.

> "Now came still evening on, and twilight gray
> Had in her sombre livery all things clad;
> Silence accompanied, for beast and bird
> They to their grassy couch, these to their nests
> Were slunk, all but the wakeful nightingale."

The dark horizon is relieved of its blackness by the still darker line of the island trees. Stars begin to creep out from the distant sky, twinkling at you merrily; then one shoots swiftly with flashing tail across the bosom of the broad sky. The boat seems to almost fly past receding banks and trees. We are now at the last island, called the "Tow Head," just four miles from home. Deep bluffs extend along both sides of the river, separating Iowa and Illinois. Fire off your gun! Why?

Do so, and listen. A flame shoots from the muzzle. The noise startles you. Well it may, for it is like a cannon between these bluffs. Loud thunder seems tame compared with that report. And now, mark how it bowls along the side of yon bluff, appearing to gather renewed force as it travels; echoing and re-echoing until you feel that your gun has set the whole world in commotion; that a fierce storm is raging on the bluff sides and in the ravines. You listen for the sighing of the wind, the gentle patter of the rain falling on the water, but the bright stars shining down on us dispel the illusion. Wonderful, isn't it? Yes, it is. I have heard this same effect scores and scores of times, and I never pass these bluffs at night without setting them off, loving to hear their angry, growling mutterings. On your right the city of Lyons is drowsily nestling amid her hills and valleys, brilliant in her electric light, the tall chimneys of the mills reaching toward the skies. Those deep red lights are on her piers and rafts, warnings of danger to the mariner. The green and red hang from the extreme heights of a steamer, snugly lying at her dock. The blinking lights just opposite are at Fulton, a picturesque little town at the foot of rolling hills, where, in day, or moonlight nights, milk white monuments show up clearly in her cemetery on the hillside, thoughtful remembrances of the departed dead.

One more mile and we are home. Our game I counted, just after you killed the goose,—65 mallards, 5 redheads, 6 blue-bills, one canvas-back, and one goose,—a splendid lot, but not unusual.

We are now in one of the widest places in the upper Mississippi River. A perfect sea of water encompasses us on every side, and yet it is not deep here. Push

down your oar, and as we go along you will feel a grating sensation, as the blade moves over the bottom, which you can easily touch. We are floating over the crest of a hidden sand-bar, whose great flat surface lies dull and motionless exposed to view when the water recedes a little. At the west, grimly standing in relief as against the horizon, immense trees are dimly seen. They are the remnants of a thick forest that stood here before time and civilization robbed them of their silent companions. And then to the south of us, see, what a beautiful sight! a steamer coming through the draw of the bridge, flashing her electric light until the very heavens are illuminated by its strong rays. It darts on the river, and the rippling water seems as silver in the brightness of its rays; while on the outer edges of the reflected light it grows duller and duller, until from a leaden hue it turns into inky blackness. The island stands out in the brilliant light, more conspicuous than in the glare of the sun as the quivering light flares on the dense trees, turning their leaves to a darker green. The flitting, fleeting objects waver and tremble on the sleeping earth, bringing into prominence some old blighted stump, standing grimly, like a patrol on duty; and we can imagine that at any moment some Mephistopheles, with satanic grin, will peer from behind it, waiting and watching for some pliant Faust, or gloating over the miseries of some penitent and weeping Marguerite.

> The leaves, in fantastic shadows on the surface glimmer,
> Flitting brightly, tremoring lightly, by the night wind gently blown,
> While over the water the brilliant light shimmers;
> Each moment something wierd, some grand sight is shown.

At the levee our man waits for us, helps us with the

game, our boat, and our hunting outfit. We leave all but the guns here till morning, too tired to be encumbered with anything but them. Our weary limbs are dragged homeward. The blinds are opened; a light shines brightly at the window. It signifies nothing to the casual passer-by, but to us it is a telegram, notifying us that a warm supper and loving hearts are anxiously awaiting our return. Our step on the walk is soft and low, but not soft enough nor low enough to deceive him who waits the coming of his master. A joyous bark announces our arrival, and we feel—

> "'Tis sweet to hear the watch dog's honest bark,
> Bay deep-mouthed welcome as we draw near home."

CHAPTER VI.

CORN-FIELD MALLARD SHOOTING.

When wintry winds have commenced their dreary and disconsolate shrieking, and prairie ponds are frozen over, mallards take to rivers and running water, gathering together in immense flocks at these open places. At such times as these, pin-oak ridges extend far above the open water; streams are low; seeds have drifted from their accustomed places, driven by fall winds; wild rice seeds are buried beneath the water's surface, now a thick coating of ice; and then tall brown and yellow stalks bend and nod as they bow before the piercing wind. At such times, mallards congregate together in open water and hold vast conventions, discussing, apparently, the question whether or not they had better depart south on their semi-annual migrations; but unanimous in one thing, that is, that they must live. Early at break of day, when the dim gray light first appears in the east, just when the crimson light is seen, the reflection of old Sol, who soon peeps his round red face above the surface of the earth, the hunter stands shivering in a western corn-field, with his back turned to the cold northwest wind, waiting impatiently for the morning flight. How bitterly cold it is on this vast prairie of upturned sod, faded grass and great corn-fields. He pulls his collar higher up, tries to draw his head farther down into its protecting

shelter and shivers all the more. What a dismal morning it is, just as the day is breaking. The flurrying snow whirls and darts and bounds over the frozen ground; the leaden gray in the east grows gradually darker, as the eye follows it westward, until it dissolves into a seal brown, and finally into an indistinct black. As the hunter ponders over the situation, he thinks how hard it would be for one to endure such exposure, if necessity compelled it,—but then he instantly shakes himself together, whacks his freezing hands against his benumbed limbs, stamps his cold feet on the frozen ground, and thinks how pleasant the anticipation is, when one is sitting before a grate fire, to hunt ducks on a wintry morning in a corn-field; how unpleasant it is to experience the reality.

In coming into a corn-field the ducks are very wild, and the utmost caution must be exercised to get good shooting. The hunter should not secrete himself behind a fence; because of all places, a fence fills them with the most dread, and they may fly low before approaching it; but when they get to it, will ascend to a height where it is simply nonsense to shoot at them. The hunter should build a blind right in the place where he knows they have been accustomed to light. That blind must be built of corn-stalks, and to disturb as little as possible the shape, formation and condition of the field before the blind was built. Ducks have very sharp eyes, and are great observers of the condition of a field where they have been accustomed to feed. It will not do for the hunter, merely because he is in a field of corn, to gather up an armful and build a shock to hide himself. If there are shocks in the field, this does away with the necessity of it. Let him conceal himself in one. If

there are no shocks, throw an old rubber blanket on the ground, dress in yellow canvas or corduroy ; lie down flat, sprinkle stalks slightly over the limbs and body, and rise, shooting from a sitting position when firing. Avoid, under all circumstances, building a high, conspicuous blind, for you are dealing with birds ever on the alert and always suspicious. Should the ground be covered with snow, your dress should be white. Suits worn by plasterers are the best on such occasions. Decoys may be used with great success, but don't call to circling ducks. They do not want to be called into the corn-field, for while feeding, they do not call to one another. Depend more on your decoys, and when you think flying ducks will hear the sound, glue the end of your tongue to the roof of your mouth, and click to them. This is the noise they make in feeding. The best blinds are pits dug into the ground as described in " Canada goose shooting." Dead ducks should be set up as decoys, as fast as killed, until one has quite a flock. If you have no dog, start for a crippled duck before it strikes the ground. It is almost impossible to find them in a corn-field when crippled. Everything looks alike. Nos. 4 and 5 are the best sizes of shot to use. The birds will usually be killed at long range, and good-sized shot and plenty of strong powder are necessary. Always have at hand some shells loaded for geese. This is also their feeding place and the time of year for them, and it will be no occasion for surprise if you pick up two or three any time.

CHAPTER VII.

SHOOTING MALLARDS IN A SNOW STORM.

THE very best shooting may be had at times, during the heaviest snow storms. The ducks seek hidden, sheltered, cosy retreats, protected from the violence of the storm, and dislike to leave their feeding grounds. At such times, they leave the corn-fields, large ponds, rivers, and all unsheltered places, and hie themselves to the heaviest timbered woods, where under the protecting shelter of the large trees, drooping willows, or in quiet, smooth bayous, they sit all day long, feeding on buds, acorns, smart-weed, larvæ and the roots of grass ; or, preening themselves, will sit around in indolent leisure.

On such a day, when the wind is driving the drifting, blinding snow into one's face, or the melted snow is trickling down his neck, as the young hunter walks before the blinding storm, he should avoid the prairies, the open sloughs, and look for some quiet, sheltered spot, and there he will surely find the birds. The drifting snow, the howling wind, as it plays through the leafless branches, breed in the ducks a spirit of uneasiness, and they fly singly, in pairs, or in flocks over the tall trees as they come in from the open places. The strong wind impedes their flight, the snow blinds them. Along they come, facing the storm, flying slowly over the tree-

tops, looking for a cozy retreat occupied by their kind; or suddenly caught by the stormy wind, veer to one side, carried quite a distance before being able to recover themselves, when again they advance as before. The shrieking wind, the blinding snow, the wild day, will cause many a beginner to hesitate about going out at such a time. But if it causes him to hesitate it also removes suspicion on the part of the ducks, as if they thought that on such a day they would be unmolested. The young duck-hunter must be brave, willing to endure cold and exposure, remembering that although the wind may blow, the snow drift, and the air be filled with the falling flakes, in the deep woods it comes down gently through the tall trees, and there all is quiet, and the forest is a solitude indeed. He should dress warm. It seems impossible on a day like this for one to be too warmly dressed. Discard style, let your only desire be comfort. Wear a hat, its broad brim will protect your ears, your face, and neck, and it will keep the snow from coursing down your body in tiny but unpleasant rivulets. Put on plenty of flannels. Your shirt should have a large collar, and around your neck wear a warm soft woolen scarf. Wear woolen gloves, as any other kind soon become wet and useless; if of wool they can be wrung out, and unless the day is very cold, which it won't be if snowing, they are not uncomfortable if a little wet. At such times I prefer shooting bare-handed. Wear clothes of some neutral color, as near the color of the forest as you can, not too dark, dark objects are always conspicuous, a lead or "pepper and salt" is about the thing. Don't be afraid if a little snow covers your hat. White is the prevailing color

around you now. Have plenty of shells in your pockets. Never think of hunting ducks in a snow storm, or, in fact at any time, without using water-proof shells. In spite of your cautiousness—and you won't as a beginner be overly supplied with it,—snow will get into your shell pockets and melt ; your coat will be wet, your shells wet. It is utterly impossible to keep things dry at such a time. Many and many's the time I have plunged my hand into my shell pocket and found shells dripping wet, covered with seeds, dust and crumbs. Being water-proof, they worked all right, after wiping them hastily on my coat. Were they other than water-proof I could not have used them, and a whole day's sport would have been spoiled. Be vigilant and on the alert, constantly turning your head, that the duck may not approach you from any direction unseen. Unless you are thus always on the watch, some lone duck will quietly fly over your head unperceived, while you are carelessly fingering your gun, or idly staring at your feet. You suddenly come to yourself, and hastily bring the gun to your shoulder, but too late, for as he gracefully rises over the trees, you perceive he is just out of range. Disgusted at what you choose to call your ill luck, you mentally resolve it shall not occur again, neither does it within the next half hour, but it does again later in the day, possibly several times. You relax your vigilance as the flight decreases, and with thoughts in dreamland, at least far away, your carelessness loses you many good chances for a shot.

Decoys should be used in this kind of shooting, placed out in such a manner as to attract the attention of the passing birds. Wooden ones, very natural and lifelike,

can be got through any gun dealer. They answer the purpose exceedingly well, and I use them, although should you not have any, set up your dead ducks as fast as killed, until you have quite a flock. This you can do by sharpening a small stick at each end, stick one end in the mud, the other thrust into the duck's head just behind the base of the bill, under the chin. Exercise judgment in setting your decoys, but remember, they must assume a natural, easy position, as if in life. Don't point their bills toward the heavens, as if the ducks were trying to discover when the storm would cease. On the other hand, don't turn their bills toward the water, with neck outstretched, making the duck look as if it had eaten something that didn't agree with it; but having adjusted the head and neck properly, see that the body is all right, draw the wings close to it, smooth the feathers nicely, then step back and look at it. If it looks to you precisely as a live duck does on the water, all well and good; if not, experiment with it until it does. It's these little attentions to things that to the beginner may seem time thrown away, that go far toward increasing the duck-shooter's bag during a day's shoot. As good shooting as I ever had has been during the progress of hard snow storms, and I know no better way to show the young duck-shooter how to hunt during a snow storm than to give him a description of one I had with an amateur as my companion; and, in order to make it more plain, I will adopt in part a conversational style, basing the account entirely on facts as they actually occurred, the hunt being the second duck shoot my companion ever participated in. He could look both with pride and pleasure on his business career, but his hunting education had been

sadly neglected, necessarily so, on account of want of opportunity

I had promised to take him out after ducks, and took pleasure in living up to that promise. To be sure, he was inexperienced, and knew little or nothing of what was expected of him. But his want of knowledge was more than overbalanced by his eagerness and willingness to do his share of hard work, and to make the best of a very disagreeable and nasty day. Promptly on time, 6.50 A. M., we met by appointment at the depot, destined for the river, thirty miles away. A change of clothing had made a complete change in the appearance of my friend. On this occasion I was his tailor; at least, supplied him with ready-made clothing, pants, hat and coat of heavy ducking, dirty and begrimed with the natural consequences of many hunts. How different he looked from the day before;—then a genteel person in business suit,—now the very picture of indifference and neglect, as if he could whack a bull or drive the foraging cattle from the corn-field at a moment's notice. Underneath his arm he held, seemingly a box; from its size, I thought it contained bedclothing, but since we intended returning the same night, I asked him what it was. With a broad open smile, his lips parted, he simply replied, "grub."

"Grub?" said I in astonishment.

"Yes," said he, "grub. I thought we might get hungry, and had a lunch put up."

"Well," said I, "no danger of us starving to-day with that amount of eatables with us."

"Didn't intend we should," replied he, as he tried to scratch a hole through his borrowed pants, eventually lighting a match.

The morning was clear and beautiful, the sun shone brightly, not a cloud broke the even smoothness of the horizon. "Harry," said I, "we are going to have a fine day. Little cool now, but the sun will soon warm things up."

"Don't know about that," replied he, "the barometer indicates a storm."

All this time the freight thundered along. We had gone perhaps ten miles, when a huge, dark cloud suddenly lifted itself over the western hills. Steadily it came along with incredible swiftness, covering like a blanket the clear sky. The wind began to whistle against the caboose, flakes of snow hurriedly scattered through the air, as if frightened at their temerity, and then fell, bowling over the frozen ground. The cold screeching of the wind, as it blew through the telegraph wires, made the chills run down my back. I looked inquiringly at Harry, as if to say, "What do you think? Going to be a tough day, isn't it?" He evidently construed my thoughts correctly, and gave me a knowing wink, that I didn't know how to interpret.

We soon arrived at the station. I cast a long dubious look at the leaden sky, and turning to Harry, said, "the day is going to be wet, nasty, and very disagreeable. We are not out of meat at home, and are not obliged to hunt. What do you say, shall we go on, remain out all day, get wet through and through, take our chances on finding good hunting, or declare discretion the better part of valor, and return on the next train?"

Candidly, I thought he would say, "let's go home." Imagine my surprise, when he turned toward me, grim determination depicted on his face, and said, "Entreat

me not to leave thee, or to turn from following after thee, for whither thou goest, I will go, and where thou lodgest, I will lodge."

I thought at the time the language was sublimely beautiful, and gave him credit for it. I knew the expression was not original with him, but that he borrowed it; that it was the language of Ruth to her mother-in-law, when Naomi entreated Ruth to return to her people. I could not help but admire the apt illustration he made, in showing the actual state of his feelings. I felt at the time that the quotation was made by him with the intention of passing it off on me as original, he not considering the possibility of my being posted in Biblical lore. It was an uncharitable act on his part, but later years gave me an opportunity to retaliate, which I did and no questions asked.

With the assistance of a couple of the inhabitants, who are always to be seen at every small station on the arrival of a train, we soon had boat and traps out of the car, placed on a wagon, and were bound for the river, the deep forest line of which we could indistinctly see through the driving snow. We were both warmly dressed, and feared neither cold nor storm. It was a short trip to the river, and we were soon ready to start out. Our boat was one such as is fully described in another part of this volume. Decked over at bow and sides, sitting close to the water, her smooth sides and rounded bow easily slipping through the water, while her stern glided along, scarcely making a ripple. We placed our eighteen mallard decoys on the bow, it being a handy place to carry them. Besides, in the old dirty coffee sack, they made a very necessary blind for us. Harry seated himself at the oars, while I, with sculling

oar, guided the boat in open channel, or amid thick and overhanging branches and bended trees, was forcing her swiftly along. The water was high, and boomed merrily along through the overflowed lands and between the fallen trees. Occasionally, through the trees at a distance, in small open places, we could see little flocks of blue-bills, swimming carelessly on the placid water; then again, on the narrow necks of land that had escaped the overflow, pin-tails would sit on the alert, with their tall necks stretched up, making a marked contrast to the pairs of mallards we could at times see as they drifted along the brush and willows lazily picking off the buds; or, gracefully tipping up their plump bodies, while searching for the appetizing acorn. Now and then the faint report of a gun would reach our ears, frequently two reports in quick succession, showing that some hunter having braved the storm was reaping the benefit his pluck had earned.

We were now about three-quarters of a mile in the woods, and in the blinding snow could see the almost constant flight of birds, some coming against the strong wind, scarcely able to buffet it, while others, just out of gun-shot, were allowing themselves to be driven before the wind at the rate of sixty miles an hour. I had called Harry's attention to these, and incited by the frequent jumping up of mallards all around us, he was getting the duck-fever pretty bad. We landed on a ridge not more than thirty feet wide, and then we consulted and made our observations. Harry thought we ought to stop here. In his inexperienced mind he could see but one thing,—*ducks*. He did not stop to think that it was one thing to shoot, another to retrieve them, for on each side of us was deep running

water, that would cause a duck to float for fifty yards before we could possibly retrieve it, and compel us to return against the swift current. Besides, the deep thickness of the branches overhead would scatter the charge of shot, making it almost impossible to shoot with effect.

To the north of us I saw ducks flying low, as if seeking a spot to feed; then saw them drop through the trees and disappear from sight, not returning. I knew that we had found their retreat, and that where they lit we would find shallow water, possibly a little land. We found it as I expected. Selecting an open place, as open as we could among the thick trees, we put our decoys out, and located ourselves so that the ducks when killed would fall above and be carried toward us by the current. We stood in water a foot deep. No sooner in the blind than five mallards bowed their wings above the decoys. A long shot, but I succeeded in making a double. Harry did not shoot, "afraid he would spoil my shot," said he. I then said to him, "Shells are plenty, and ducks also. You will never learn to shoot unless you try. Stay close to me and bang away at every bird that gets near you." "Another thing, Harry," said I, "hold well ahead of every bird you shoot at. I know it's hard to do so, for the inclination is strong, indeed, hardly to be resisted on the part of a beginner, to shoot right at the duck. It looks so large and is such a nice object to fire at. Then again, he just can't shoot at the *air*—he will aim at the duck, then feeling he should obey, draws ahead. He is pointing at thin air, a foot or two ahead. Behind this thin air he sees a beautiful green head, glossy feathers, perhaps a bright sparkling eye, the thought

flashes through his brain, "What! shall I shoot at *nothing*, when behind it is a duck that I can surely kill? Fie on such advice! I am after ducks, not air, and this one is mine." He changes his aim, blazes away right at the duck, expecting of course to kill it,—misses it; the duck moves on, while the hunter, noticing a stray feather that a scattered shot had separated from the duck, calls his companion's attention to it, and says, "I hit him hard, look at the feathers fly."

This is the experience of every beginner.

"You have fired at least twenty times, and your ducks are still to be had. You haven't killed one, look in the boat; there are at least a dozen that I have killed. I thought I would let you make several misses, before your attention was called to the reason. You have the reason now, you are going to kill some birds, and if you will only follow my advice, you certainly cannot fail."

Just then a duck came towards us quacking loudly, entirely disarmed from suspicion. "Keep low," said I, "Remember what I said. Hold a foot ahead of her and she is yours. Kill her! I won't shoot."

The duck was a little to one side of us, and about 25 yards high. Harry fired and made a clean miss.

"Look here," said I, "You din'dt hold ahead of that duck. If you had you would have killed it. Here I have been giving you the benefit of my twenty years experience, and all it cost you was to try it. You promised you would, and forgot it within two minutes after I got through talking."

I don't know but that I spoke petulantly, perhaps too much so; anyway it had its effect on Harry, for he turned to me with face flushed, and said, "Was that

your duck? Have you lost a duck? Ain't there any other ducks here that you can get, without kicking because that one got away? What in thunder is the use of making a fuss about one poor lonesome old maid of a duck, any way?"

"It wasn't the duck, Harry," said I, "but it was your shooting *at it*, instead of *ahead*, as I told you to do. Now, frankly; didn't you shoot right at it?

"Well," said he, and he assumed the most confidential manner, "I cannot tell a lie. I *did* shoot at the duck, with my little gun."

The reader will probably imagine at this time that I embraced and forgave him, and told him I would rather he would miss a hundred ducks than tell a lie. Nothing of the kind; I simply told him to stand still, and not be splashing water over me.

"Will!" said he, "I am not much of a wing shot, but the probabilities are that I will hit a crow before long."

How he expected to hit a crow was a mystery to me, as I hadn't seen one all day, and told him so. He merely smiled. The flight had decreased, and we were only getting an occasional shot. My sight was directed toward the north, watching a lone duck as it flew around undecided where to light. A slight sound attracted my attention, a gentle gurgling noise, like rivulets of water running over unbroken pebbles. It seemed to stop, then could be heard again with increased volume. The sound was not an unfamiliar one to me. I turned my head, and there stood Harry, with face upturned to the falling snow, pointing the base of a bottle almost perpendicularly, the neck partially in his mouth, while a peculiar suction caused the amber fluid to spurt down his willing throat. His left eye closed.

as if sighting the disappearing "crow," his right hand firmly clasped the bottle, while with his left he complacently rubbed his stomach.

"And this," said I, "is the crow you were so sure of hitting?"

"Yes," said he, "This is the crow referred to. Look at it."

I did so, and saw by the picture that it was an old crow, seven years old. I told him that from its looks he had hit it hard.

The ducks were uneasy, and while they would notice the decoys, they didn't show any great inclination to light among or near them. The wind blew strong, and I found it necessary to shoot from one to three feet ahead of them.

Harry did but little shooting, preferring to see me kill the birds. Once more I brought him to the scratch, and felt satisfied, that since he had been so successful in hitting that "crow" that his success there would embolden him, and fill him with renewed courage, and so it did.

The ducks were now flying pretty freely, and I determined the first good shot he should not only shoot, but kill. We didn't have to wait long. A lone drake came flying slowly over the trees, facing the wind. He was in no hurry, only seeking the right place to alight. He veered a little to the right before reaching us; now was a little to our side. No allowance was necessary to be made for his flight, but it was for the strong wind.

Harry was covering the bird.

"Swing your gun, first on his body, then his head, then a foot ahead of him as near as you can," said I, "keep your gun slowly moving and pull."

I stood behind him. It seemed as if I could see the gun follow my suggestions. The loud report rung through the woods, and the drake fell with a splash, dead in the water. Harry turned to me excited and delighted, throwing his wet arm around my neck, and tenderly said:

"William! thou hast taught me to kill the flying duck, and I thank thee for it! Many a time and oft have I tried in vain to do this thing, but have failed. Thy experience and thy skill hath disclosed to me the secret of thy success,—and I am indebted to thee for it."

Imagine the scene, dear reader—there in the solitude of the forest. I felt that the necessities of the occasion demanded a reply on my part, but appropriate language failed me—he was embracing me tenderly. I came near telling him not to lean quite so heavily against me, but thought that entirely out of place, considering his eloquent speech. Gulping down a piece of apple, nearly choking myself, it brought tears to my eyes. Harry, not knowing the cause of the tears, thought they were the result of his eloquence. I had by this time regained my self-possession and said:

"If thy heart hath taught thee that thou art indebted to me, thy debt is cancelled. Did not thy friends trust thee to go to the deep woods with me, and should not I disclose to thee the secrets of mine experience? Follow but my advice. Thou may'st not hit the "crow" so often, but the swift flying duck will be at thy mercy."

"Will!" said he. "What?" said I. "Thou hast placed me under lasting obligation to thee for this day's sport. When the heat of the summer's sun hath caused

the milk in thy refrigerator to sour, and thy negligent hen hath forgotten her daily task, remember, that I am thy neighbor, and that my Jersey cow and Brahma hens still live."

This was too much for me, and with the apple still lodged in my throat, I gasped, "Let's eat our lunch."

Witnessed by the tall trees, our mouths filled with ham sandwiches, his wet arms clinging around my neck, we swore eternal friendship, Harry and I.

After lunch, Harry profiting by his successful shot, made several beautiful ones. He followed the suggestions made, and as a result was rewarded by seeing his birds killed clean and dead. We both shot ten-bore guns, full choked,—mine a nine and three-fourths, his a ten lb. Our shells were loaded with four and one-half dms. powder, a card, a thick felt, then another card on powder; one and one eighth oz. No. 6 chilled shot, with a card wad on top, the shells being firmly crimped. This makes a very killing load, and with it we had no difficulty in reaching the duck forty and at times fifty yards. We stayed until about 4:30 in the afternoon, and killed a nice bunch of ducks. Of course lost some, but not many. Harry did the wading, but when the birds dropped in deep water I sculled to them, and picked them up.

We arrived at the station at dark. There were two hunters there. They had been out all day, had the same opportunities we did, but did not know how to hunt; and as they said to me that night, "the confounded ducks always flew just where we were not." They showed three, the result of their day's work, while we exhibited to them just sixty-six,—all mallards.

On the train home, they related their experience and

wondered why they did not get more, when we did so well. It was amusing to me, although I could have told them what programme they followed throughout the entire day,—any old hunter could. It is a programme that most young hunters faithfully carry out. It begins; the *first* number is *talk*, generally a duet, simply because two are present. Were there more than two it would be a—well, it would depend on the number of voices, as all present would join in. The *second* number is usually a recitation, in which one of the party descants on the wonderful things he has seen, and the great shooting qualities of his gun. To make it still more interesting, he allows the oars to slip against the locks emitting sounds that can be heard for a mile through the still woods. The balance of the programme isn't much different, although the *finale* is grand. This usually takes place, when they attempt cautiously to land the boat, that they may make a sneak on ducks they have seen light. The rower attempts to get out quietly, and lets his oars fall clattering into the boat. He goes to pick them up, the boat tips a little; to save himself he accidentally steps on his dog. The dog yelps, running the chromatic scale as far as high "C," while he in the stern tries to keep the boat from upsetting, swears at his partner for his clumsiness, and both kick at the innocent dog. The dog slips from under the descending foot, the kicker by the force of his kick loses his balance, and falls headfirst into the cold water, or seats himself in the soft mud, while the dog sits on his tail on the bank, and joyfully barks.

CHAPTER VIII.

SNIPE SHOOTING. WILSON'S SNIPE—JACK SNIPE.

(*Scolopax Wilsonii.*)

When Spring time comes, in the month of May,
And warm rain, and southern winds have driven the frost away,
With faithful setter, we hie us to the swamps,
To find Jack Snipe, in his favorite haunts.

Twisting and turning, against the wind he flies,
"Scaipe!" "Scaipe!" he calls, with grating cries.
Then steadies himself, and darts ahead.
A quick report, and the bird falls dead.

WILSON'S SNIPE, generally known as the "Jack-snipe," is a bird familiar to every one who ever hunted over western waters, in the valleys of the Mississippi or Missouri. He is as regular in his arrival as the seasons; spring and fall he makes his appearance with never failing accuracy. To those who are versed in the

secrets of his habits, and who have hunted him successfully, the bird does not fly that causes the hunter's heart to bound with delight and sends the warm blood rushing through his veins, as does this erratic bird. He comes and goes at such times as pleases his own wandering fancy. To-day, one may visit the well-known places of his resort, confident in finding him and his kind in large numbers. The most inviting places are thoroughly searched. The keen nose propelled by the tireless lope of the faithful setter or pointer fails to search him out. Swamps are traversed; meadows tramped over; marshes through which the springs gently flow, are gone through; slimy beds of peat and muck are visited, and still he cannot be found. This, at a time when past successes would warrant one in feeling confident that the bird would be found in all the places that have been so faithfully searched. The skilled shooter does not despair because of his ill-luck, but bides his time; for experience has taught him that on the very next day, perhaps, the very places where he did not see a feather, will be full of birds dispersed throughout the marsh, singly, in pairs, and scattered in bunches or wisps, from twenty to fifty feet apart. They are found in abundance in Illinois and Iowa in all the low-lands—black and loamy soil being their place of feeding. They come and go, as a general thing, in the night. This is shown by places which have been thoroughly hunted over one day, and nothing seen, on being visited the succeeding day, are found to be, one might say, alive with them. The time of their arrival is both spring and fall. I have always found them more abundant in the spring. They come the latter part of April, early in May, sometimes late in that

month, and then remain for from ten to thirty days, depending altogether on the weather. Living as they do on worms and insects taken from the soft soil, the time of their coming is at the period of the disappearance of the frost. They come in the wake of a few warm days of bright sunshine, days that fill the soul with secret longing; days that bring to their northern homes the blue-birds and the robins—birds of good omen—sure indications of the arrival of spring. Following these few bright days comes a warm, gentle rain, falling so quietly it seems to penetrate deep into the frost-ridden ground. The snipe know of this rain, instinct possibly; any way they know it. And, while we are aware of the fact that they will soon be among us, "All through the night, with tireless flight" they come—in the morning they are here. On such a morning, when the sunshine and rain have driven the frost and coldness from the marshes, let us take a trip with an amateur snipe-hunter. Meeting one on the street, a friend of mine, one whom I know to be a fair shot at prairie chickens, and the possessor of a good setter, I accost him, as follows:

"Well, Ned, old boy, how are you? Just the one I want to see. We have had several bright, warm days, and now a gentle, warm rain; the marshes are sure to be full of jack-snipe to-morrow. What do you say, to going out and having some fun with them?"

"All right, I'll go, but want you to understand right here, that I am a tender-foot on the snipe question. Don't know that I ever shot one. Have occasionally stumbled over one while after ducks, but they were too soon for me,—perhaps because I sent duck shot after them. But then, you are an old snipe-hunter, and if

you want me to go with you, I will promise to stay with you as long as my shells last."

"Very well, we will start in the morning about eight. It's only two hours drive, and that will give us all the time we want. How's that setter of yours—any good?"

"*Any good!* Well, now, that's a nice question to ask. 'Any good!' I should remark that he was. Why, my dear man, that dog cost me one hundred dollars, besides expressage. His grandfather was Old Rufus, a dog that—"

"Oh! let up! What do I care about his grandfather. What I want to know is, whether he will work close, stand staunchly, and retrieve?"

"If that's what you want to know, he won't retrieve; wasn't brought up that way; won't work close; wouldn't have a dog that would. But for being staunch! I want to tell you what he did one day. When I was in Western Iowa last—"

"That settles it! If your dog won't retrieve, we don't want him. As for what your dog did in Western Iowa—save that, and tell it at the Club. They will probably be pleased to hear it. What gun are you going to take?"

"Think I will take my ten and one-half lb. hammerless ten-gauge. She's a dandy, full choke, extra close, and at forty yards, with five drams powder, I can—"

"It don't make any difference to me what you can do at forty yards. You don't take that gun. That's your duck gun; and if you were to follow me for three hours, lugging that cannon, your wife wouldn't know you. Why, man, you will be half the time in mud up to your knees, and the weight of that gun, with shells, would just about break your back, and paralyze your

arms. Take your seven one-fourth lb. 12 ga., load your shells with three and one half dms. powder,—put three black or pink edged-wads on the powder, one and one-eighth oz. No. 9 shot, with a card on top, and you will have loads that will do their work, if you point your gun right. Put your long rubber boots on when we go, the lightest pair you have.

"Well, good-bye. Be sure and be ready at eight in the morning. Never mind lunch, I will take enough for both, and furnish a dog too."

"Here we are. Right on time, exactly eight. Come, get in, Ned, and we will be off. There's your wife at the door waving good-bye to you."

"Why, Billie, old boy, what's this you've got here! Bless me! Your retriever. Is he any good?"

"Please don't. He didn't cost any hundred dollars; his grandfather never made any record; his father was a setter, and his mother a spaniel; he takes after his mother in color and texture of hair,—she being liver color, and very curly. I got him when a puppy six weeks old, and trained him myself. What do you think of him?"

"That's a fair question, and you are entitled to a straight answer. I think of him about what the dog said when he looked into the eyes of a cross-eyed cat. 'You may be all right, but your looks are mighty deceivin'.' But don't feel offended, Billie, at what I say, the dog *may* be all right; his looks are against him, that's all."

"It's all right, Ned, if the dog don't make you open

your eyes to-day, I am mistaken. But here we are at the marsh. Jump out, put about forty shells in your pocket, and after unhitching the horse, so he can't break anything, we will be off."

This is a beautiful day. Just my idea of the kind for good snipe shooting. The sun beats down warm; the wind is blowing fresh and strong from the south, and we ought to get splendid sport. Look at Don! How he eyes us with keen intelligence, as if he would read our inmost thoughts."

Ned glanced carelessly at the dog, and replied—

"Do you know, Will, what my idea of a good snipe day was? A day cold and raw; with clouds flying, and the winds blowing a gale from the north or north-west. I thought that on such a day, they would dislike to fly, and would lie so close that one could almost kick them out. Now, you have upset my theory, and as I told you, I am a tender-foot in snipe shooting, please explain where I am wrong."

"Well, one might say the actions of snipe seem controlled entirely by the weather. On cold, raw days they are uneasy, and wary of approach; the whistling wind and the flying clouds breed in them a spirit of restlessness identical with the day; instead of nestling quietly behind some sheltering hummock of grass, protected from the wind, they hie themselves to the sparsely growing grass on the borders of the marsh, and are constantly on the alert. It seems impossible to approach them. They will rise from forty to seventy-five yards from the hunter, and dart off with the greatest rapidity. They will not fly far,—perhaps one hundred yards; but should one try to get near enough for a shot, the same performance is gone through with, and

the snipe-shooter returns home disgusted, his bag not having one, where, considering the birds seen, he feels he should have five.

"It will be noticed that the influence of the day, cold, raw and disagreeable, has its effect on the snipe, and a mild, warm, bright, sunshiny day, with warm south winds affects them just the opposite.

"How they do love the warm sun of spring, and how they do hate to be disturbed. They hear the splash, splash of the hunter; they catch glimpses of his tall form, slowly but surely approaching them; still, they don't fly, simply hugging closer to the ground, instinct teaching them that their dull, dead gray and white bodies cannot be distinguished from the marshy ground. Suddenly, they realize the danger they are in, and despairing of escaping undiscovered, they spring as if thrown by some hidden power, and away they go, uttering grating 'Scaipe! Scaipe!' from their throats. But what's the use of telling you this now, Ned; we are on the ground, and observation for a few hours will teach you more than I can tell in a week. We will start in and hunt north. My reason is, we want to go *with* the wind. Always hunt snipe with the wind, because they rise and fly either against the wind, or present quartering shots. If you hunt against the wind, they will not lie well, and when they do get up, will fly straight from you, presenting a small zig-zag mark to shoot at, which isn't where you thought it was when you pulled the trigger. There is no comparison between the flight of a prairie chicken and a snipe when both are fired at flying from you.

"Here we are in the marsh! Slip in a couple of shells, and keep your eyes open, as they won't ring a

bell before getting up. Don will pick up the dead ones. You take the first bird that gets up."

"Let him go," says Ned, "any time, and if I don't knock the stuff——"

"Ha! ha! Just what I expected when it flew up. It rose against the wind, and when you fired the first barrel it wasn't twenty feet from you, coming almost into your face. You missed it with the second, because your first miss rattled you. Don't be in such a rush when they get up. I thought you would shoot too quick and miss it, so I was prepared for it.

"See! Don has just picked it up, and it's only about thirty yards from us; I had plenty of time to kill it after you fired both barrels. You see what the dog did? He marked the bird and has gone and got it while you and I stand talking here.

"Now, watch him give it to me.

"That's right! Good boy! See, he sits on his haunches, raises his nose to me, and I take the bird from his mouth, without having to stoop over a particle. If there is anything I dislike, it's having a dog half retrieve; or, when bringing the bird all right, to walk around me, ducking his head, and constantly keeping the bird out of reach; or, dropping it on the ground at my feet,—worse still, jumping up, putting his paws on me, splashing and plastering mud over my clothes. The latter is decidedly dangerous, and especially so if one is shooting with a hammer gun.

"Look at your feet, Ned!"

"What's the matter with my feet? I don't see anything," replied Ned.

"Don't you see those holes about as large around as a pencil? They have been boring here for worms, and

SNIPE SHOOTING.

have been having a grand time. Keep a sharp watch, for this place must be full of them.'

"There now! good shot! A tailer, and you grassed him beautifully If you make many shots like that, I shall leave all the tailers for you."

"Thanks, William. I am free to admit that those infernal cross shots I never could make, but straight-away! they are the ones I am after. When I was in Dakota after chickens, I never——"

"Good enough! you ought to have missed it! Got up right under your feet, and went straight away,—your favorite shot, too. Here you were going to tell how you made a record in Dakota on straight-away shots, and missed the softest kind of a one, while trying to convince me of your skill."

"Well, I'll be blamed! Honestly, I felt sorry for that snipe when I shot, for I thought it was *too* easy. I certainly held on it."

"Don't doubt but you did, Ned. The reason you missed was, at the instant you pulled the trigger the snipe changed its intentions, dropped about three feet as if it was going to light, then, at the crack of your gun concluded to move on. I didn't shoot, because the smoke from your gun bothered me."

Thus the time passed away, until between us, with frequent misses and many brilliant shots, we had bagged about thirty birds. We had tramped steadily for full two hours, and Ned realized the fact when he said:

"Look here, Will! In ancient times they used to punish violaters of the law, by placing them on racks and forcibly pulling their limbs apart. Do you know I think they make a great mistake? What they ought to

have done was, made them hunt snipe in such walking as this. Honestly, I believe I have dislocated my spine, pulled apart some of the ligaments of my body, and sprained my right ankle. Thunder! but I am tired."

I most certainly could not deny this assertion, and the heavy manner in which he dragged his weary legs along proved it. Poor fellow! I can imagine I see him now.

"Hark! What's that noise," said he, "I have heard it for the last half-hour."

Directing his attention to a small speck in the air overhead, I replied:

"The noise you hear is made by a jack-snipe. On warm, bright days, singly, sometimes two or three will arise to a great height, so high, indeed, that they become at times indistinct. When at an extreme height they describe a circle from fifty to eighty yards in diameter; then suddenly descend with the greatest rapidity for thirty or forty yards, then ascend again. The noise made is in their descent, caused, probably, by their wings cutting the air, making that strange, quivering, tremulous sound you have heard so often to-day. Some hunters ascribe it to their becoming uneasy, and as an indication of their intending leaving for some other feeding ground. Others say it's their way of courting, and the frank acknowledgment on the part of the male that he wishes to choose a mate. But the more practical hunters say they do it because they know they are the only bird that can do it with grace and rapidity—"

"Ned," said I, "let's get out of this."

We were in a place where the bogs were from one to three feet apart.

"And we will go to the wagon and have lunch. Keep a sharp lookout where you step, and avoid stumbling against any of the bogs, or you will get a fall."

"I will," replied he; but at that instant his left foot stuck in the mud, his right plunged forward, striking a large hillock, and down he went, his gun landing in the mud about six feet from him. To save himself, he threw out his hands, and they stuck in to the wrists in the slimy mud. I helped him up. His once fair face was spotted with mud, and he was a laughable object to look at. I laughed and laughed until my sides ached and the tears streamed down my cheeks. All this time he stared at me, never smiling once. Suddenly he said:

"Are you through?"

I replied, "Yes."

"Then" said he "any man who will laugh and enjoy the result of an accident, as you have, my candid opinion of him is, and I stand ready to prove it, that he is a chump, and daren't take it up, and that I can lick him in a minute."

I appeased his anger, helped him get the mud off, and in a few minutes his accustomed good humor returned, and he said he didn't blame me a bit for laughing.

After lunch and an hour's rest, selecting better walking, we bagged about twenty more. Ned was willing to admit that Don as a retriever could not be beat, but that it was a pity that he would not point the birds.

"Ned," said I, "I have hunted snipe for a great many years, both with and without dogs, and excepting the pleasure derived from seeing a good dog quarter and point staunchly, I would rather hunt with a retriever than any other way. Snipe must be hunted

with the wind. Now, if one hunts with a dog, expecting him to point and do justice to himself, the dog cannot do it, because going with the wind his power of scent is reduced to such an extent that the poor fellow is handicapped, and by the time he gets near enough to the snipe to wind it, the snipe sees and hears him, the bird is flushed; the hunter scolds the dog, he cannot do himself credit, soon realizes it, and is discouraged. On the other hand, I know where to look for them. Don at my heels is ever on the alert; he sees the snipe when it gets up; when it falls he knows I expect him to mark the bird; and should I have half a dozen down at one time, to bring them to me. I also mark the spots where they fall as near as I can, and should the dog neglect to retrieve any, as near as possible I send him to the spot. By his keen scent and systematic ranging he soon finds the bird."

"Right here, Ned, if you ever hunt jack-snipe without a retriever, when a bird falls, mark the spot, and don't you take your eyes off it, either. If you do, your game bag will contain one snipe less than it ought to. It is the hardest thing in the world to find,—a dead snipe, after you have once lost sight of the place where it fell. If it falls on its back, then there is no trouble, since its white breast makes it a conspicuous object; but let it fall breast down, with wings a little outstretched, it is exactly the color of mud and grass, and as a fact, it would be as hard for you to find that bird as it would be for your wife to find you home on lodge night before half-past eleven.

"I promised that you should find out what kind of a dog Don is. You see that spot to your right about twenty yards? That's a likely place for snipe. We

cannot get across there, because of the mud; we must not leave without investigating it, and Don must help us out."

Sending the dog on, and directing him by motion, I continued my conversation with Ned.

"Now, watch him! How's that? Look how stealthily he goes along, no chance for a long swinging lope in that deep mud. Watch him! how he goes, half lope, half trot. Steady, old boy! How's that for a point, Ned?" Don had drawn on to a snipe. The indistinct scent would have made undecided a less staunch and experienced dog. Not so with him. That faint scent was to him almost the breath of life. There he stood, motionless, as if carved of stone. It seemed as though the scent of the snipe had petrified him. He stood leaning forward, seeming in anticipation as if from the hidden depths of the marsh the snipe might suddenly arise before we were ready. Half crouching, he dared not step backward, lest the noise might frighten the bird. He dared not look at us, lest once doing so he might lose the faint scent of the snipe; and thus undecided, yet decided, he stood a picture of life, once seen never to be forgotten. His nose was held high in air, as if to invoke the assistance of the mild fresh breeze to help him retain the scent. His ears were slightly cocked, as if some slight noise might disclose to him the hiding-place of the wary bird. He looked steadily before him, the pupils of his eyes dilating, entranced by the scent of the hidden object. His tail stood out straight behind him, like a rod of iron; no lashing of it now, from side to side, until at times the tip was red with blood, from reeds and rushes, from grass and brush beating against his sturdy sides. His left fore foot raised until its ball

seemed almost touching his side. But look! He moves! The snipe has skulked away from his first hiding place, emboldened by the silence of the pointing dog. Skulk, glide, steal away, my eccentric friend; the nostrils once filled with your delicate scent will not give you up, but will follow you tirelessly, until you attempt to escape with your swift moving wings. Slowly, cautiously, never for an instant relaxing the vigor, the stiffness of the muscles of his body, the dog creeps forward. How quietly he moves; how gently, how noiselessly, he puts down first one foot and then the other in the soft soil. He fears almost to put them down, least the grating of his feet and legs on the dried grass should arouse the bird. He is moving in a westerly direction now, and the breeze will aid him in the scent.

Apparently the bird is some thirty feet ahead of him. The cross wind blowing from the south brings a new scent to him. Quick as lightning he turns his head to the left, dropping his head, and crouching still lower, he points a bird within ten feet of him.

Ned could stand it no longer, and with flushed face, and eyes filled with brightness, enthusiastically exclaimed, "Splendid! grand! I never saw a dog work like that. Do you know, Will, from the time the dog first winded that bird, I never took my eyes off him, and when he pointed, then roaded, then pointed again, I most felt that I could smell the snipe; but when he came to the second bird, and twisted his head so suddenly, I felt the cold chills run down my back, and——"

"Great Scott," exclaimed Ned, as a snipe got up right under his feet, which he knocked over within ten yards of him.

"Mark, Ned," said I, directing Don to start it up. He jumped almost over the bird, flushing it, when I missed it clean, Ned wiping my eye. This did him lots of good, and he took especial pains to call my attention to it several times during the day. We worked the marsh both ways, crossing and recrossing, to give the dog the benefit of the wind all we could. Feeling we had enough for one day, about seventy, and intending to come again, we started for home, after being snugly tucked under the robes. The evening air was delightfully cool and refreshing, after our hard tramp in the sun.

Ned broke the silence as follows: "When I first saw that dog of yours, Will, I formed a mighty poor opinion of him. I think he knew it, the way I acted toward him. Right here, and in your presence, I want to apologize to him."

Saying this, he caught Don by the nose, looked into his upturned face, and said, "Don, I am mighty sorry if I have hurt your feelings, if you were of the feminine gender I would call you a 'Daisy,' but being of the opposite sex, you are a 'Dandy." At this Don sneezed, caused by Ned holding his nose high in air. Ned smiled and acknowledged it as an acceptance of his apology on the part of the dog.

Then, turning to me, he said, "What do you know about snipe? Where can they be found; that is, in what countries other than this, if any?"

"Why, Ned," I replied, "Wilson's snipe derived their name from the great ornithologist and naturalist, Wilson. There are no birds so universally scattered over the face of the globe as this same corkscrew gentleman. He is found in China, having been seen in the

markets there, on the coast of Brazil, in the rice fields of Egypt; they are found in Java and Sumatra, and in almost all the islands of the Indian Sea, in Madagascar, Ceylon, Japan, the Falkland Islands, in the desolate solitudes of the Southern Atlantic; in the arctic regions of Siberia, and in every part of the old Continent, on the Pacific Slope, and almost everywhere in the United States. They afford sport to the citizens of the extreme South, and are digested with toast by the epicures of the far North. By sportsmen everywhere they are welcomed.

"I noticed to-day that they bothered you considerably. You are a fair shot for an inexperienced one,—ought to be good at chickens, but ducks would worry you. You are a snap shot, your gun discharging almost at the instant of touching the shoulder. There are two occasions when one can shoot snipe successfully. First, before they have got fully started, firing at them as soon as they jump from the grass; second, when they have flown thirty or forty yards. When they have gone that distance they settle into a comparatively steady flight, and are not difficult to hit. What it requires then is a hard hitting gun, and the shooter to be a good judge of distance, speed and the velocity of shot. The medium period of shooting, the time between these two, is the time when most new snipe shots shoot. This is when the snipe display their agility, and try to twist themselves into a spiral or gimlet of life. Not succeeding after going fifteen to thirty yards, they recognize the fact that they can't turn themselves inside out, and settle down to a steady flight. The beginner cracks away at them at this time, misses many and gets disgusted,—his disgust not being alleviated

by mopping the perspiration from his forehead, or making a misstep, wrenching his limbs. The trouble with you, Ned, is on those long cross-shots; you bang away quickly, make no time allowance for distance between you and the bird—shoot away; if you hit it, all right; if you don't, you secretly curse your luck, or blame the gun, when you, and you alone, are to blame. At those long cross-shots, the same as I saw you miss to-day, you ought to have fired at least from—My! How the time has slipped by. Here we are at your gate. Some day Don and I are going to take you with us after ducks. Then I will demonstrate to you that your snap shooting won't do at long range—

> If at forty yards a foot seems too far ahead,
> Make it two, keep your gun moving, and the bird falls dead.

Excuse this poetry, but I can assure you it's not only spontaneous, but original. Good-bye," and Ned, with one-half the snipe we killed, passed quickly in the gate, and I went home. Thus passed one day among the snipe.

Does the reader think Ned enjoyed this hunt? Cannot you recall many incidents in your life similar to this? When cold winter has passed silently away, and warm welcome spring has returned, when birds are filling the air with melody, streams flowing joyously along freed from their ice-bound covering, buds are swelling, grass in tiny sprouts peeping inquiringly through the brown earth? The hunter is a *generous* soul, he loves nature in all her many changes, and delights to wander admiring her beauties in her manifold forms. He feels as Milton did, when he expressed himself so beautifully in these words:

"In these vernal seasons of the year, when the air is calm and pleasant, it were an injury and sullenness against nature, not to go out and see her riches, and partake in her rejoicing with heaven and earth."

DESCRIPTION. "The snipe is eleven inches long, and seventeen in extent. The bill is more than two and one-half inches long, fluted lengthwise, of a brown color and black toward the tip, where it is very smooth while the bird is alive, but soon after it is killed becomes dimpled, like the end of a thimble. Crown black, divided by an irregular line of pale brown, and another broader one of the same tint passes over each eye. From the bill to the eye there is a narrow, dusky line; neck and upper part of the breast pale brown, variegated with touches of white and dusky; chin, pale; back and scapulars deep velvety black, the latter elegantly marbled with waving lines of ferruginous, and broadly edged exteriorly with white; wings, plain, dusky; all the feathers, as well as those of the coverts tipped with white; shoulder of the wing deep, dusky brown; exterior quill edged with white; tail coverts long, reaching within three-quarters of an inch of the tip, and of a pale rust color, spotted with black; tail rounded, deep black, ending in a bar of bright ferruginous, crossed with narrow, waving lines of black and tipped with whitish; belly, pure white; sides barred with dusky; legs and feet a very pale, ashy green; sometimes the whole thighs and sides of the vent are tarred with dusky and white. The female is more obscure in her colors, the white on the belly being less pure, and the black on the back not so deep."

CHAPTER IX.

MALLARD—TIMBER SHOOTING.

ALONG the rivers in the West, duck shooters look ahead with fond anticipations of approaching spring, with its annual overflows, its complete submersion of low-lands, for in such places, among the tall and stately trees, in the murmuring, gurgling overflow, mallards had rather be in this season than in any other place. The hunter knows this, and as the short days of winter glide gradually away, from beneath the hidden place from out its case or box his favorite gun is brought. With tender solicitude he fondly handles it, carefully looks through the shining barrels, thoughtfully feels the true springs of the lock as he raises the hammers, and then carefully lowers them; or, if a hammerless, with outward indifference he slides back and forth the safety catch. He wonders if he has forgotten his old time skill, if lack of practice has dulled his eye, or stiffened or made less supple his arms, or his muscles; he looks out the window with thoughtful mien, and his eye sees the deep black on the top of his neighbor's chimney, an arrow on the topmost crest of the house, some filagree work in distinct relief. He brings his gun to shoulder, glances over the rib, and then, right in front of the muzzle, accurately, he sees the object covered by the sighted gun. With a grim smile of satisfaction he lowers the gun, then raises it again and again, each time his faultless aim, his faithful arm

covers the object aimed at. His aspirations are greater, and quickly aiming first one place, then another, he sees that he has made a double. Regretfully sighing he puts the gun away, and looking round spies his wife standing looking smilingly at him. He thinks to act indifferently and tells her he was looking at his gun, "afraid it would rust." She looks at him archly and replies, "Guns must rust very easily, for you examined yours only yesterday." They go out together on that bright Sunday afternoon, the melted snow coursing in tiny rivulets down descending places, the bright sunshine greeting with affectionate glances all the earth, the blue birds flitting, the robins caroling,—all nature glad at the approach of spring. The wife talks of house cleaning, of papering, of spring repairs, of flowers throwing out sweet incense of perfume, of roses, pinks, hyacinths, and lilies, and how the flower beds will be made, how the blooming flowers will blossom prolifically,—thus she walks so sprightly, thus she talks so lightly, wondering at his silence. Was he listening? Yes, so far as a man could, while his thoughts were far away, down in the depths of some deep wood, where the rising water had overflowed the banks, leaving slight ridges where acorns were abundant. His wife turns suddenly and looks at his face. She sees him looking at the sky so reverentially. Allowing her sight to drift in the same direction, what does she see? Golden—lined clouds floating slowly through the air, driven by the mild south wind? Nothing of the kind. Instead, she sees about a dozen geese flying north, led by an old honking gander. How does this compare with the reader's experience? But never mind, don't plead guilty,—the law presumes you innocent until actual guilt is proven.

When the hunter is among the timber, he must not think that, because all around him there is a perfect sea of water, that one place is as good as another; for in spite of the plenteousness of water, the seeming sameness of all places, there is a great difference, and this the ducks know. As the hunter stands on some ridge with water all round him running gently, then again in another place flowing swiftly, he should mark the general direction of the flight, and notice where they are dropping in. Possibly, he will think that all through the timber the water is the same; that the ducks are flying aimlessly around with no object in view, simply delighted at finding so much water. Not so; they are looking for a feeding spot, a place where sluggish water lies; where they can swim in any direction without effort, where, thickly strewn in the water, tender willow twigs abound, where, in its shallowness, without diving—mallards do not dive for food—they can stretch their necks and feel along the ground, or tip up their bodies, stick their bills into the soft mud, dig out the relished acorn, while to sustain them in this position they gracefully stand on their heads, and to keep their balance occasionally fan the air with their broad feet.

This is the place the hunter should seek, and not rest until he finds it. Be assured it is to be found in the timber, and the ducks will be there waiting for you. When routed out, they will come again, and keep coming. When you look for a spot like this, hunt for high ridges. When most places are overflowed, the swift current will run around them, then quietly steal back behind the protecting ridges in little eddies; and while the water booms and roars in the river, it is so quiet and still in these places of back water, that leaves

and sticks float immovably on the surface. Don't you suppose the ducks know this? Of course they do. One of the cardinal teachings of their early education was to hunt out these places. It was an early lesson to them, and one they will never forget. It is more natural, then, that they should choose a place where they can leisurely feed, than to be carried along by a swift-flowing, turbulent stream. To get at a place of this kind it is almost always necessary to have a boat. Grant that you have a boat and a good dog, let me put you down in a place of this kind. You hide the boat, drawing it in among the trees out of sight, fill your pockets with shells and are ready for shooting. Look around and see how I have placed you. You are facing the south; behind you the trees stand closely together, their limbs forbidding shooting in that direction. And again, because the main body of the river flows there, and your dog would soon tire himself out. Take your stand in the blind I have made you, just on the verge of the shallow water. You think the blind isn't high enough? Why, it is fully 4½ feet. Your clothes are corduroy, nearly the color of the trees. The ducks won't see you unless you move, and you will have to stand anyway. So by merely bending your body a trifle, you are hid and simply have to straighten up when ready to shoot. You notice that open place just across the little point? I know you do, and are wondering why I haven't put you over there instead of here, for you think then you could shoot on all sides. That is true in one sense, but, were you there, the birds would come high over the timber and commence to lower their flight just as they were getting out of range. As the wind is with them, they always light up wind.

As you are now facing the south, the wind blows from you, and the ducks will fly over you with the wind, then come back against the wind to alight. Notice particularly how the decoys are placed. Eighteen in all, quite a flock. Instead of putting them in bunches, or flocks, they are strung in pairs up and down this narrow place, forty yards each side of you. Why is this done? Because they have commenced to pair, and you will notice they are flying in pairs all the time. Possibly you thought while setting them out I was a little particular. So I was, for I wanted every pair to be in the sunshine. There they glitter and show up nicely. See what a nice, open place I have selected for you, giving a clear view to the east, west and south. What a splendid day, with the sun shining in a cloudless sky, and a mild, cool north wind. Use your duck squawk frequently whether you see birds or not. Often they will be in hearing if not in sight. Don't attempt shooting through the tops of those trees behind you, for through those limbs and twigs you won't kill once in twenty times. It is surprising how one misses in shooting through the tree tops,—shots that one is certain of; every duck shooter knows this. You are now ready for business and pleasure. Just allow me to step into the blind with you and see you kill a pair. No, thanks! Keep the gun,—I want you to do the shooting.

Mark, west. A duck! Call her. Well, well, wonder why she didn't come? Must have seen us! Nothing of the kind. Don't feel hurt that you frightened her away with your call. When you blew it, you made the sound too loud. She wasn't far, about a hundred yards—and in this still woods would have heard a soft mellow call. Instead of calling in that way, you filled your lungs with air,

then shot it through the call at the bird. It wasn't the call she expected to hear when she saw the decoys. This is the way you called: *Quack—quack—quack!* Do you know when you heard that call before to-day? Well, I will tell you; It was when you routed those single ducks out of the timber as you came through. It was a cry of fright with them. That's what scared the duck. When you see them coming in, and off, say 100 to 200 yards, call, until their attention is attracted to the decoys. After they once set their wings to come in, don't call, but keep quiet. At this time click with your tongue, just as you would at a horse. This attracts them very quickly. When you call them at a distance govern your voice according to where they are. Remember, that slight sounds travel speedily and far in the quiet woods. Learn this call: "Me-amp"—"Me-amp," Utter it in a baritone voice, softly, with a vibration. Practice this, and you will have one that you can depend on, and will always be on hand when wanted. Here comes a pair. Now, let's see you make a double. See how their wings are set; how they are bowed. No! no! don't shoot. They will turn; let them come back. See how pretty they are in the sunlight; the golden yellow on the duck, the chestnut and white, the emerald green on the drake. Don't move; now try and get them both. Ha! ha! You are a great one! Bound to have the drake, wasn't you? Well, you got him, if you did loose the duck. Really, you ought to have killed them both. But in your anxiety to kill the drake you showed poor judgment. The duck was about thirty-five yards from you, the drake twenty five. If you had shot the duck first, then the drake would have been plenty close enough

to kill; but after you fired at the drake, and the smoke cleared away, the duck had too much the start of you, and consequently got away. Bear this in mind hereafter, that when two ducks come in, in killing distance, always shoot the one farther away first. I am going to leave you, now, right in this blind. I have placed you where the ducks are, and it would be ungenerous on your part to expect me to kill them, — you must do that. By the way, please keep secret this place; it's a favorite one of mine. I found it two years ago, and right in this very place, at that time, an inexperienced shot and myself bagged 106 mallards in two days.

CHAPTER X.

MALLARD SHOOTING IN ICE HOLES.

LATE in the fall or very early in the spring, excellent shooting may be had at times in ice-holes. These holes are found in swift-running water, or are what is generally known as air holes. When the weather has been cold and prairie ponds are frozen, driving the ducks from open land to timber, naturally at this time they seek water wherever it may be found. They fly through the timber and over the trees in constant search for open water,—places where experience had heretofore taught them that water and feed could be found in plenty. Their flight is slow, their search thorough, and they are not unrewarded, for they find an open spot where water may be had. When they find a place like this they alight in great numbers. The quantity lighting in the hole depending on the number of them coming. This hole, like an omnibus, always has room for one more; and in they come, darting, sailing, fluttering, until the sheet of water resembles a mass of moving life. After the hole is filled they become generous, and wishing to make room for fresh arrivals, that come like a deluge pouring down from the sky in every direction, they crawl out and sit on the ice, quacking vociferously, or with craws distended with corn, fruits of the last over-land trip, they sit on the ice blinking, preening and sleeping the time away. Their loud calls vibrate and course through the

still woods, carrying welcome music to the alert ears of the hunter. He marks the direction, and stealthily proceeds in the direction of the resting birds, whence faint and almost indistinct calls are wafted to him; then some noisy duck, having partaken too freely of corn, and feeling the effects of its fermentation, raises her pretty head and quacks so loudly that he marks the spot where the birds are located. His dog is filled with nervous apprehension lest he commit some act, show some movement that will attract the attention of the hordes of resting ducks. Cautiously the hunter raises his hand, as he turns and beams on his four-footed companion a look so full of warning. The dog interprets his master's thoughts, and returns to him a bright look, so full of confidence and cautiousness. They understand each other; one is human, the other of the brute creation. The master's mind shows his thoughts in his eager eyes; the dog receives it, and is governed accordingly. No need of words,—their understanding is complete and satisfactory, and the dog treads noiselessly in the footsteps of his master, carefully avoiding dried sticks, twigs and rattling leaves. The hunter desires to reconnoitre, and stooping over with trailing gun in hand, he steals toward the vast trunk of an ancient oak. As he nears it he drops gently, quietly on his knees, and lithes himself toward the objective tree. Gaining it, he rises carefully, peers intently round its wrinkled body, and drinks in with delight the pleasurable sight before him. As if the dog could read the innermost thoughts of his master's mind, he imitates each move of the hunter, governed by the same thought, the dog advances, hesitates, stops, in exact conjunction with

his master. As the man stoops, the dog crouches lower, and neither look to the right or left, but gaze steadily ahead with increased interest, knowing without seeing, what they are approaching. When the hunter gets still lower and crawls along the ground, without looking around he reaches behind him, closes his fingers tightly together, drops his hand near the ground, reaches far back, shows his open palm to his silent companion, and thus conveys to him warning for greater caution. The dog understands this signal, and crouches still closer to the earth. Stealthily he steals and glides along, so low he cannot get lower without crawling, for his belly scrapes twigs and leaves and dead sticks. What an intent look in his quiet, determined face! His tail, his pride, that has so often beat brush, grass, weeds and briar, when in the open field or murky swamp, now hangs behind him still and lifeless, lest its movement might disclose his master and himself; and then, when he reaches his master's side, the anticipation of a hunter is felt by him; he becomes inquisitive; the quacking of the ducks is plainly heard; the dog is unable to resist the temptation, raises his head with eyes brightly beaming, looking as if they might almost burst from their sockets; his ears bent forward listening for faintest sound; his teeth imperceptibly chatter as he tries in vain to curb his strong emotion. His master notes his excited state, quietly lays his strong hand on the intelligent brown head, tenderly pushes it down, while the dog casts on him a look of gentle reproach, while the love-light shines from his handsome eyes, as he looks into the eyes of his friend, his companion, his master, whom he would gladly die for.

Those two friends stand silently hid behind the protecting tree, the hunter debating in his mind, whether to step boldly out, plainly in view and rout the birds, or attempt, by crawling, to get a sitting shot. He decides the former, and when he steps out in open sight, is seen, and with a grand roar that fills the woods with its volume, the birds arise in fright, and in pairs and flocks, both great and small, fly away. The dog looks askance at his master, questioning the propriety of routing such an immense flock without firing a shot; but a reassuring pat on the head, a kind word, dispels the doubt from his mind, and he cheerfully and silently acquiesces to the judgment of his master. The ducks are loath to leave a place like this, and soon begin to return—they will not keep out. Coolly the hunter knocks them right and left; the dog is in an ecstasy of delight. Constant exercise has caused the blood to rush through his veins; he comes and goes in and out the water, his brown coat glistening with glittering ice, forming brilliant beads in the sun-light; then he marks the course of a wing-tipped drake, as it tries hard to follow the flock, and falls one or two hundred yards from the shooter. Away he goes along the ridges, through brush-piles, over frozen sloughs and soon returns, the drake in his strong jaws, with its good wing beating against his nose, while its long neck encircled with its white tie, its glossy dark green head teeters and swings up and down in perfect rythm with the movement of the dog's body.

When a man finds a place like this, he has found a mine, which is exhaustless for that day. If he intends staying in the neighborhood, he should hunt some other place similar to this,—hunt them on alternate

days, and his shooting will be excellent each day. It is advisable to scatter corn both in the hole and around its edges on the ice; put plenty in the hole if the water is shallow. The birds will soon discover this and will come often; and if the hunter is a good shot, will tarry long. As fast as killed, set up the dead ducks for decoys; keep on until you have a good sized flock,—no fear of having too many, the more the better. In building a blind, advantage must be taken of locality. If in timber, secrete yourself well with a good open place to shoot through. Better have an indifferent blind, and an open place to shoot through, than the best of blinds when you find you cannot shoot without interference of limbs. Should you find the shooting must be had in an exposed pond or river, where a shore blind cannot be made, your ingenuity will be taxed to hide yourself and you must depend as much on quietness and patience, as on a blind. Should the ice be strong enough to bear you, build a small wall 8 or 10 inches high of ice or snow to conceal you; a little hay, a rubber blanket spread over it; cover yourself with a white cloth, wait patiently; it's a splendid place for contemplation, especially if the thermometer registers down about zero; and you can drive away the coldness by thinking of Turkish baths, strawberries and cream, and the church sociables you enjoyed the past summer.

One writer speaking of ice-hole shooting, says a a good way to build a blind is, "take a barrel, chop a hole through the ice so the barrel will slip through, nail pieces of scantling on the sides of the barrel, fill the barrel with water until it sinks down far enough, then bail the water out, first cutting narrow edges through the ice; push the scantlings down, give them

a half twist and they will hold the barrel where wanted. Put in hay and push snow against the top of the barrel to hide it, and the blind is complete."

No doubt this would work, but it would hardly pay to go to so much trouble. The only good way is to shoot from the shore as first mentioned,—any other manner has drawbacks that will more than offset the pleasure derived.

Never take any chances in trying to get duck shooting around ice. Better not get a shot than attempt to get to some place where there is a flight, and then take chances on breaking in. If you haven't a boat or a good dog, and know you cannot get the dead birds without retrieving them yourself over ice that might be weak, turn your back to that hole and walk away,—you have no right to take any such chance, and no wise man will do it. Death by drowning is said to be an easy death. If, then, you prefer death in this way, choose summer time; the water will feel decidedly more pleasant, and flowers are much cheaper.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE MARSH—MORNING, MIDDAY AND EVENING DUCK SHOOTING.

ONE of the first impressions engrafted into the mind of the young hunter is the thought of early and late shooting. When he has become fully supplied with gun, clothes, dog, decoys, and the many incidentals that go toward completing his armament or outfit, his mind naturally runs in the channel of shooting. Older friends and experienced hunters tell him what they have done, times they have had, shooting in indistinct light by the dim twilight, and even by the moon's pale rays. So his desire is to start early, and either by driving or rowing, to be stationed on the shooting ground at break of day.

Grant, then, indulgent reader, that you and I know such an amateur hunter, and for the purpose of illustration, allow me to take an inexperienced person out for a hunt, the special object being to give him the benefit of our experience and practical knowledge. Among our intimate friends, now that you are to have a voice in choosing, who shall we take? Ah! I read your thoughts; mine are the same, and he is the one I will ask. Who is it? Why, who could it be but yourself. It seems strange how the same thoughts will run at times, in the minds of different persons, doesn't it! Possibly you smile and reply, "Great minds run in the same channel." Not so with us, however, for we

lay no claims to greatness. Your claims, no doubt, are those of innate modesty, while mine are——

"Well! well! come with me, and we will get things ready for an early start, as we have five to seven miles to go, and must be in the marsh at break of day. You can get shells at the gunsmith's loaded, or, if you prefer, load them yourself. At any rate take plenty. Better bring back twenty, than run short. No matter what your success may have been in any one day, if you allow yourself to run short a few shells, the pleasure derived is entirely lost, by reason of the chagrin and disappointment felt when out of shells. You will find it poor consolation indeed to think how many shells you have left at home, and 'might have brought along.' Yes, you will feel that you *might* have done a great many things—and as you see the mallards flopping over your decoys, then alighting within twenty yards, saying to you derisively, 'M'amph!' you will go down in your pockets for the twentieth time feeling for the shell that isn't there, then grate your teeth, smother an exclamation, forcible but not elegant, appropriate but not refined, and you will arise in your blind filled with disgust, as you see the mallard rise and leisurely fly away, while over the marsh his mocking cry reaches you, 'M'amph,' 'm'amph.' Then, through your brain, fast fleeting thoughts pursue one another, and this one always at the head—'how thoughtless I was in not bringing more shells!' Then you think you might possibly have been a bigger fool,—but you doubt it emphatically.

"The shooting to-morrow will be mostly over decoys. Your gun throws No. 6 shot, close and strong, and that is the size you had better shoot. That size you will find is always right for ducks in a choke bore gun; be-

cause the gun will throw them closely together, and you will find, if held right, that sneaking cripples will stand a poor chance of escaping the charge; while pintails circling around at a height of fifty and even sixty yards, will be much surprised, for we will kill them, and a good many of them, at that height. If I remember right, you told me your gun was a 10 bore, weighed nine and three-quarters pounds, 30 in. bbl; right barrel modified, left full choke. That is just my idea of a gun, except with me a gun for ducks should have both barrels full choked. It cannot shoot too close for ducks. Your shells load with four and a half dms. powder. What kind? It doesn't matter much,—any kind you get from a reliable dealer will satisfy you. Now, don't be in a hurry to load your shells, but use care, for they must be loaded carefully and properly, to expect good results. By the way, here is a shell I had in my pocket the other day, when out targeting my gun. This is the kind you want. You won't have time to load shells this afternoon, so go to the gunsmith's and order enough like this, four and a half dms. powder, one card on powder, two pink-edged No. 9 on that, then another card; next one and one-eighth ozs. No. 6 chilled shot, with card on that; then crimp tightly. That's what I use for ducks. Don't be afraid of chilled shot hurting the inside of the barrels, no fear of that; experiments have been made time and again, and it has been demonstrated beyond a doubt that it does not injure the metal in the least.

"Don't know as I have time. Yet, seeing I am right here, passing your house, will step in for a moment and see what kind of a hunting outfit you have. Good enough! Corduroy all through; coat, vest and pants—

although I don't like that cap, a hat is much better; it affords protection from both sun and rain, and you will find a cap a nuisance in the rain, and very little use in the sunshine. Your clothes, dead-grass color, are all right for marsh shooting; indeed, almost do equally as well in the timber. Hope your long rubber boots are big enough for you. If there is one thing I dislike more than another it's tight-fitting rubber boots. Mine are always one size larger than my feet. You needn't laugh, I don't have to have them made to order.

"Now, be sure and dress warm. Duck shooting is cold work, and although it's only the middle of November, a cold rain may set in, or a snow storm, and it's far better to be dressed too warm, than suffer the slightest cold. Take your rubber coat along, no matter what kind of a morning it is. I never go without one. I did once, and stood out in the rain all day without any protection, or place to go to get dry. The only comfort I had all that time was sympathy. This, from my companion, who, warmly ensconced in a long rubber coat, continuously throughout the day, dried my shivering bones with *sympathy*. I learned a lesson that day and haven't forgotten it. Sympathy is very good to take in small doses, but sheds water poorly; a long rubber coat is far preferable. My rubber coat is dead grass color, and I have often stood in it in pelting rain for hours, without discomfort.

"In the morning at three o'clock I will call for you. Pretty early? I know, but we want the early morning shooting, and we must be on the ground at break of day. I will take Don along. He will retrieve for both of us. Well, good day. I am going to the warehouse to get boat and decoys ready."

Three o'clock in the morning, with the moon dimly shining, I call at your home. Of course you are up. What young hunter goes to bed with mind filled with pleasant anticipations of a day of sport is able to sleep out his allotted time? He still remains undiscovered. As a dark shadows flits between me and the lighted lamp, I know a youthful form is impatiently awaiting my coming. The door is open, and cordial greeting invites me in. Fragrant and delicious there steals to me through the frosty air the aroma of boiling coffee, and as I glance back at the calm sky, it seems to me that the silent stars glitter less coldly down on the slumbering earth. Thoughtful in you to have this coffee ready before our departure. It is wonderful the effect a cup of hot coffee has on one's system when starting out at break of day; there is nothing equal to it. A cup of coffee and a sandwich then are not surpassed by the most elaborate *menu* at any other time. There is an indefinable relish in it that every hunter knows and appreciates.

The frosty November air has laden all unprotected objects with a whitened shroud. The stillness of the surroundings, the purity of the atmosphere, causes the faint rappings of the oars against the boat's side to resound with a loud crash. Don lies snugly at my feet, his favorite bed. You pull with youthful strength and vigor the light boat, until she skims over the water; then, as if to show the strength of your strong arms, your broad back bends to the oars, the ash blades quiver, the boat not sufficiently long to respond to the full force of those strong strokes surges ahead, displacing a huge volume of water at her bow; while waves of miniature billows retreat from the boat's sides. As you raise the

blades from the water your wrists are slightly moved forward, the oars are spooned, and the broad blades lightly skip on the surface, while little globules of water look as silver in the moon's rays. How quietly grand the scene as we go down the river. Above and below us the shimmering water, overhead the crescent moon, the twinkling stars. At the east the quiet island, where, in the darkness, oak and willows, hickory and birch, ash and maple trees, commingle together in indistinct profusion. At the west is the slumbering city, with its massive houses, its tall spires and towering mill stacks, vieing with each other in their efforts to pierce the clouds. The frosty air would soon make an inactive person suffer from cold. You are at the oars. I keep up a circulation by constantly working the sculling oar, while Don, poor dog, his teeth chattering mutely appeals to us for warmth. We cover him with an old coat. As he snoozes his cold nose into the dry hay and gently wags his tail, he conveys to us his silent but expressive thanks.

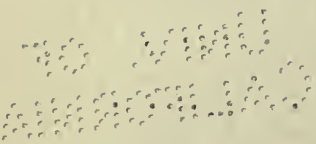
The rapid current keeps us on our journey, and soon we pass beneath the railroad bridge, and are wending our way through this vast swamp, this renowned marsh,—the Meredosia bottoms. All round us the low, flat marsh revels in monotony. In any and every direction we behold a deep darkness, the earth and sky seeming to meet as one. In the murky gloaming we thread narrow channels, through flags and rice, our only guide being the lighter appearance of the water which we follow. It is well I know this marsh, for in this darkness all is the same in appearance. We will stop here, for in the early dawn this place is a passing point where ducks of all kinds fly over, going to and from their feeding

grounds; they fly aimlessly enjoying their morning exercise, or investigating the surroundings to find a suitable place to spend the day. We are early on the ground, and it will be a full half-hour before we can see to shoot. Sit still, and I will force the boat into these rushes, so we can both face the east. We must do this, for the first light appears in that direction and we can faintly see ducks coming from the east when we could not see them coming from any other point of the compass. Perhaps you think we have come in a good way, and are far from the Mississippi River. Only about a mile, taking a straight line; but by the tortuous way we came it is much farther. You don't know much of this place, do you? Well, in this marsh there has been thrown into the air tons and tons of lead; there is no place in the West where more ducks have been shot. This locality is a great place for point and decoy shooting, being in the line of flight as they go and return to and from the Mississippi and Wapsipinicon rivers. I never have been surprised to find plenty ducks here, for it is the place that nature intended for them. In this marsh they get wild rice, bulbous roots, and flags, A flight of a mile brings them to the Mississippi, where they regale themselves on buds, larvæ, smartweed, and roost and bask in the sunshine, and lunch off the gravel on the sandbars. Surrounding this spot, within a half-hour's flight, corn-fields are found in abundance; while southwest from here, about seven miles, mallards go after acorns, where the Wapsipinicon rushes along, overflowing its banks, affording the finest timber shooting in the world.

Did you hear that whizzing noise just now? it was a flock of blue-bills passing. They are very early risers. Now they have commenced to fly we must look sharp,

Don't wait for me, but when you catch a glimpse of any, shoot quick; there is more luck than skill in this dim light. After you have shot, never mind the result, Don will watch for that; for you cannot see whether or not you have hit. If you are successful you can hear them,—splendid! You did that nicely. You got two down, I heard them strike the water. I was just going to shoot, but you were too quick for me. No, no. Don! lie down. You can't go this time. We will not have you go now, and then return clambering into the boat, splashing mud all over us. Never fear, we will get them later. They fell in the grass, and if crippled will lie low, while if dead, we will find them, or rather Don will. We have a long day before us, and don't want the hay wet on the start. Look off to the east. See! day is breaking, and the flight will soon begin. Mark! right before you. You take the head one and I will take the other. Well! well! That was simply slaughter; too easy, wasn't it? They never knew what struck them. A pair of pin-tails. How do I know so in the twilight? Now that's a nice question to ask an experienced duck-hunter. Why, my dear friend, I know a duck by its flight, its shape, its speed, its circling, its pitching,—know them at a distance, the same as you know a man a great way off by some peculiarity in his gait. See! The sun is rising! Very soon his round, red face will stare in wonderment at us. Hear the wind, how gently it sighs through the rice stalks. And there, ahead of us, see on the water the reflection from the sky. Isn't it beautiful! The water resting so placidly while the deep red, the orange, the greenish tinge, as it joins the pale yellow, gives to the water a marbleized appearance, polished to the high-

IN THE MARSH OVER DECOYS.



est degree. Away down in front of us, watch that big flock of mallards; they circle and sail, undecided where to alight. It does seem that—whew! That was a close call. He didn't miss my head two feet, and he was going fully a hundred and fifty miles an hour. If he had struck me, you would have had a green-winged teal, and I would have been laid up for repairs. It has always seemed strange to me that more hunters don't get hit with low flying ducks, when the light is dim. I once knew of a friend being knocked senseless by a falling duck, and one time in Western Iowa I had a narrow escape myself. But the worse scare I ever had was when shooting geese in Dakota. A twelve pounder just missed my head. Hello! Just look at them down there; by Willow Island. Some hunter has routed them out. Keep quiet, there they come. Don't shoot! Don't shoot! See how they turn to my call. Watch sharp! Hold two feet ahead of that drake, and let him have it. *Good* shot! But then you ought to have killed the duck. I got my pair. The trouble was you shot too quick and got behind her. One of mine is crippled; shoot him again. What? Missed him on the water? Try him again. Well, I declare if you haven't missed again. Try it once more, and hold at the line of his body where it touches the water. There, that's more like it; you have filled him full. It is not surprising that you missed him twice, for you shot over him. I could see where your shot struck the water. Oh, I don't doubt but that you held on the duck; that's just where you were in error. Instead of holding *on* you should have held *under*. The tendency with a shot-gun at a stationary mark is always to over-shoot. One instinctively pulls with a slight jerk, and the

muzzle flies up at the moment of firing. To obviate that you should hold low ; besides, as you are usually but slightly higher than the object shot at, the shot striking between you and the duck, will glance on the water, losing but little, if any, of its force ; these same shots are often the ones that kill the bird. Here comes more of them, and for a few minutes you and I are kept busy. Then there comes a lull in the flight, and feeling assured that we will only get occasional shots, we send the dog through the wild rice after the dead and crippled, while we pick up those lying dead in the open water. You noticed how the dog, a few moments ago, passed two dead ones and started after a cripple ? Some hunters claim dogs should be trained that way. It isn't necessary ; their natural instinct prompts them to do this. The fluttering, moving duck, filled with life, trying its utmost to escape, flapping its wings against the water, maybe uttering frightened quacks, attracts the dog's attention, and he hastens after the escaping bird. Of course, as time adds knowledge and experience to a dog's hunting education, he sees the necessity of first catching cripples ; but a young dog will also do it, because he loves the excitement of the chase.

While we have been picking up these birds, I noticed about half a mile east of us, ducks dropping into some spot. There are others there feeding and enticing them down. We will go there and place our decoys. The day is pleasant, with wind blowing freshly from the south,—possibly it is not to your liking, and you recall stories of stormy days, northwest winds, lowering and threatening clouds ; you look around for the screeching gulls, harbingers of violent winds, for then you feel

you will surely get good shooting. This is the impression fixed on the mind of every young hunter. If the reader has that thought, and seriously believes it, ask an experienced duck-hunter if he don't usually have good shooting on warm, calm days. The only advantage on blustering days is, that birds flying against the wind fly slower and lower. My experience has been that some of the finest shooting may be had on the warmest, calmest days. One September afternoon, three years ago, I had as good shooting as one could wish for. The day was simply delightful, no wind and very warm. This was only one of many days of the same kind that I have experienced. The day I like for ducks is the day they are in their feeding grounds, and then it makes no particular difference whether the wind blows mildly or strong, whether the day is warm or cold.

Never mind! Don't shoot unless you are sure of killing. They have been feeding here, and will come back much sooner, and present better shots, if we don't frighten them by shooting. Nice place here for them, isn't it? Plenty of rice, and far enough from shore, so "stalkers and hoosiers" can't sneak them. This pond must be fully one hundred yards long; that is, counting the little neck where you see so many dried pond lilies, and at least sixty yards wide. I will push the boat out so you can place the decoys where we want them. Take that smallest sack first, of red-heads. Throw them out in the open water; they have weights on, and will come right side up. Don't be afraid to stand up, the boat won't upset or rock. I have hunted too much to have a cranky boat. Years ago I shot quickly from a cranky boat; didn't hurt the boat any, but I went out backward, head first, into water

cold as ice. Since then my boats are built for safety, not speed. Now just wait a bit, we don't want the blue-bill decoys too near these; they are on the best of terms, blue-bills and red-heads; still we will keep them apart this morning. That's it! Throw about half a dozen blue-bills together, then string the balance on the outer edge. They are a prying lot, and you will always note a few stragglers outside the main bunch. These mallards want to go close to the edge of the rice, just far enough out to be noticeable. You will remember they like to alight right in the edges of the rice. Now take a look. Nice lot, aren't they? Twelve red-heads, eighteen blue-bills and ten mallards. How surprised some hunter would be if he should come punting through here and suddenly see them. Tell the difference? Not much, he couldn't! Because he would be expecting to see ducks in such a place as this. The best of hunters get fooled at times; only last week, I filled one of these same decoys with shot, mistaking it for a crippled duck that fell where it was. Every hunter can recall instances and laughable mistakes made in shooting at decoys, and very few of us have avoided being caught. Never mind. Sit still and I will push the boat into those tall rushes, just behind that muskrat house. Now take the oars, pull down those tallest rushes, by bending them with the oar, and they will shield the boat, making an excellent blind. We will let Don retrieve those falling in the rushes, but let those lie that drop in open water. Whenever the dog retrieves, help him up on the bow; he understands that is his place when retrieving. He won't shake himself, —has got too much sense for that.

Have plenty of shells handy, and here, take these,

some eights, for cripples. There is a curious thing connected with duck shooting. Hunters in flight-shooting use 4's 5's and 6's; over decoys, 5's, 6's and 7's. They shoot a duck thirty-five yards over decoys with 5's or 6's, cripple it; the duck swims off, is fully forty yards away before they are ready to shoot it; then they let drive a charge of 8's, and although the duck is half buried under the water, it is killed instantly. Here is a problem to solve. If one can kill a duck swimming from him at thirty-five and forty yards, merely the top of its head and back exposed to view, using No. 8 shot, can he not kill one flying at the same distance with the same sized shot, when it presents a target eight to ten times as large, with all its vital parts exposed? Most assuredly he can. You admit it, so do I; and yet, when we start out duck shooting, knowing we will shoot over decoys, we will have ten shells loaded with other sizes where we have one with No. 8's. Since we arrived here and began placing out our decoys, and arranging our blind, numerous flocks and pairs have started to come in, then sheered away, because they saw us. This is almost invariably the case. Don't feel discouraged at this, because the hunter should take his time and make all preparations to suit. Discretion and judgment must be used in the selection of a stand, the setting out of the decoys and the building of the blind. Perhaps you think I am doing a good deal of talking and we are not bagging many birds. Remember what I am telling you, for some day you will be out and not having me, or some other experienced person along, these hints and instructions will then be of far more benefit to you than if you bagged one hundred birds to-day. Mark, south! Red-heads! The wind is

helping them along. They see the decoys. Let them pass, I will cluck and they will return and alight against the wind. Here they come! Give it to them! Six down! Shoot that cripple quick. That's it. And you were none too soon either. He only straightened up to see where the danger lay, and if you had let him dive once we would have lost him, as he would have gone clean over to the rushes, and then would have been safe. Here comes a single one. Hold well ahead and under; his wings are set, and he is coming down quite fast. See how dead you can kill him. Didn't kill him very dead, did you, with the first barrel? You overshot it, but then your second barrel redeemed you. It is a Gadwell or gray duck. It took two shells, but if you can bag a duck using two shells on an average, you are a good duck shot. It can be done over decoys, but in no other way. Bless me! I came near missing it, shot a trifle behind; it wasn't over twenty yards from us. I saw Don's eyes sparkling, and, following the direction he was looking, I saw a pair of red feet right over the water, a young mallard drake. Many and many a duck have I shot in this manner, my attention being called to it by the glistening eyes of my dog, or his chattering teeth, as he tries to restrain his nervous excitement. An old duck dog as anxiously notes the approach of game as does his master. Here comes a flock of pin-tails. Now for fun! Don't move and I will see if they can be called down. See! They notice the decoys, hear my whistle, and look at them come down, like fluttering leaves. They must have been fully eighty yards up when I first called them. *Don't* they come with a rush? Shoot just as they are over the water; fire where two or more are together. Hurrah!

We made sad havoc with them, didn't we? Eight down, with four barrels. I am not surprised at your missing with your second barrel, for you weren't watching for them to jump quite so high after they received the contents of our first barrels. Did you notice how they jumped perpendicularly? They went straight up fully thirty feet, and you undershot the second time. Bear it in mind hereafter, and as soon as you fire the first barrel, look high before shooting again, for they invariably rise vertically when shot at. Mark! A pair of canvas-backs. How do I know at this distance? By their steady flight, their long necks, their short bodies. They will come in to our red-head decoys. Don't wait for them to light, give them a chance for their lives; that is, if shooting at them at thirty-five yards is a chance. You take the drake and I will his mate. Now is your time! Pshaw! Pure carelessness! I ought to have killed her with either barrel. When I shot first I didn't gauge her speed; then the second barrel was fired hastily, and without properly judging flight. Look! Look at her wabble and teeter,—hit hard after all! See how hard she tries to keep up! Will she make it? Yes? No! *Down* she goes, stone dead, the shot having penetrated a vital part. We will find her all right, as she fell in that big open water. Yes, yes! I see those six mallards. They will come all right. The two that are about fifty yards in advance will call the others in. Keep low. Here's a drake swinging right in to us. Knock him! *Well!* You are a nice fellow. Why didn't you shoot? I supposed of course you would, and I followed him, and waited and waited for you. Lucky thing I was ready and killed him. What was the matter? Duck fever?

Thought the others would come in? Perhaps they would and perhaps they wouldn't. I have waited a good many times myself, refraining to shoot, expecting a better shot, and getting none at all, and experience has taught me that in the long run the best way is to kill a duck when it gets within thirty to thirty-five yards, no matter what you may see in expectation. Of course it would have been very nice to have waited and killed three out of the four; but suppose they hadn't come? Would have felt pretty cheap, wouldn't we? But here it is noon; we will go over on that ridge, make some coffee, and have lunch." We go, leaving our decoys in the water.

Soon coffee is made, and sitting on our rubber coats we are enjoying ourselves, as only hungry hunters can. As you face the north, I notice you gaze idly on those hills so near us, then turn your eyes indifferently away. Nothing particularly interesting about them, is there? Simply bluffs, grass and scraggy trees,—an elevated point overlooking the surrounding country. You see this, and your curiosity is satisfied, your interest dies out. Let me tell you a little about those hills, where the cattle are so peaceably grazing to-day. Some years ago, they were the rendezvous of the most desperate gang of horse-thieves and murderers that ever infested the West. It was from this vicinity they sallied forth, bent on rapine and murder. It is only thirty miles below here where they murdered old man Davenport in his own house. On these hill-tops, as late as 1832, the Sac and Fox Indians held their councils of war; here, where from their elevated positions, they could command a view up and down the broad Mississippi River. It was on those bluffs that Black Hawk,

one of the most celebrated Indian warriors that ever lived, with fiery eloquence and impassioned speech, besought his tribe to fight, and die, in the land of their fathers, rather than give up this sacred territory to the invading and encroaching whites. It was through this valley that he and his horde of savages marched time and again on the war path. It was on those hill-tops that beacon fires were lighted at times, signals and reports to their neighbors, the Iowas, across the river. You didn't know there was quite so much of history and romance connected with those hills, did you? Those mounds you notice on the hills, looking like hay-cocks, only so much larger, were made by the Mound-builders, a race of Indians in ages past. The mounds have been disemboweled of late years, and their contents were found to be stone arrows, spears, knives, hammers, and implements of ancient warfare. These mounds were the graves of warriors buried generations ago, and their arms were deposited at their sides,—weapons to protect them from Evil spirits on their journey to the Happy Hunting Grounds, showing conclusively that those hills were occupied by aborigines ages ago.

Well, from the amount you have eaten, no danger of starvation on your part for some time. It is now one o'clock, and as the flight is good to-day, we won't hurry back to the decoys. Light your cigar. What! Got a briar-wood pipe? Now that's sensible. No place for style in the marsh,—comfort and convenience are what we want here. You think it is well to rest during mid-day, because there is no flight? That's where you are grossly wrong. From early infancy it has been dinged at me, instilled into my mind, that the time to shoot ducks was early morning and from about sun-down to

dark. Every young hunter has the same text to learn from. Those times are good for ducks, but only in flight shooting, or when they come in to feed or roost, and the best continuous shooting I ever had has been in the middle of the day from ten in the morning until four in the afternoon. But mind, a knowledge of where they resort at such times must be had by the successful midday hunter, and they should be shot over decoys. At such times, look for them in rice beds, smart-weed, willow flashes, or in overflowed timber. At times one will rout them out accidentally. His judgment will tell him whether or not they will return. They will come back if they have been enjoying themselves feeding in some quiet, secluded retreat, and will feel comparatively safe. The proper way to find their midday retreat is, go where you think they may be found, don't be in a hurry to start out, but first decide where you intend going. Station yourself on some elevated place, and for half an hour watch every duck until it passes out of sight. If you do not see them light, depend on it you are at the wrong place, so move on. If you see one light, perhaps a pair, possibly a flock, then carefully watch every bird that takes that direction, and if you notice they keep dropping in, you have found their feeding ground. Go there at once, rout them out quietly as possible,—better not shoot then, but set out your decoys, build your blind, and you will get splendid shooting, as they will string back singly, in pairs, and in small flocks. My memory is fresh with the recollection of frequent incidents of this kind, when I have half filled my duck-boat with mallards, when at the same time, inexperienced hunters were splashing around through the mud, wasting ammu-

nition at travellers and mud-hens, and finally going home disgusted, carrying the report that there weren't but few ducks, and what were flying, flew so high one couldn't reach them with any shot-gun.

"Within the last half-hour I have noticed at least twenty different lots, mostly mallards, drop into some place off at our right. We will pick up our decoys and go down there. I know the spot well, and we will get some good shooting. Don't you know it's everything to hunt ducks successfully, to know the lay of the land? If you ever go to a strange place to shoot, expecting to stay two or three days, by all means put in the first half day prowling around getting acquainted with the country; it will pay you to do so. I will hold the boat steady, and you pick up the decoys. Always propel the boat against the wind when picking up decoys, then you have no difficulty; whereas, if you come down the wind the boat will drift past some, and you will have extra trouble and labor in gathering them. Pretty cold work, isn't it? Yes, it is. But it has to be done, and must be done bare-handed. On a day like this it's all right, but take a day when the thermometer registers zero or below, and I can assure you there is no pleasure in picking them up. No! no! don't wrap the cords around their necks like that,—it takes too long. Hand it to me, and I will show you how. See, commence wrapping at the right side of the breast, then bring the cord over the back and under the tail; now wrap from under the tail over the back again to the left of the breast. Keep this up till you have about a foot of cord left. Twist that around the neck, and your decoy is ready to put away. Notice the body is oval in shape and wraps easily. Now try it yourself.

That's right, you have got the hang of it. Just lay them on the bow, as we will want to set them out in the place we are going to. Don't move! Don't move! Ha! ha! got fooled, didn't she? A widgeon. She saw the decoys, saw us, still her curiosity got the better of her, and although she was fully sixty yards when I fired she was killed sure. It's surprising what long shots one will make at times. About two weeks ago I killed a mallard off fully sixty yards. My partner smiled at the shot; just then another came over, I should think seventy yards high. I killed that. It flashed on me that I had on my shooting clothes, and that it was sure death for one to come near me. Just at that instant a mallard swooped down and passed me, going like the wind. She wasn't more than thirty feet from me, and was missed clean, with both barrels. Such is every duck-shooter's experience. Pick up that last decoy, and while you are wrapping it, I will "pike" down toward our destined place. "Pike," you will remember is the local saying for "scull." Seat yourself comfortably on the bottom in the hay, get your gun in readiness, for as we go down through this tangled rice we will surely get a shot; even now we are so far in, that I wouldn't be surprised if at any moment a pair of mallards would jump—splendid! That was as neat and pretty a double as you ever made, but you shot awfully quick. No use being in a hurry on those close shots. You had lots of time, for they always rise straight up over the rushes ten to thirty feet before flying off. Pick them up by the bill or head and shake off the water before throwing them in the boat. Handsome pair, aren't they? So dissimilar in looks, too. The drake gorgeous in his green, purple and white; the

duck so subdued in comparison, when her mottled yellow and brown rests side by side with her noble mate. Just look at them dropping in down there! We are going to have a great time with them. The water isn't deep here, but mud? Anywhere from two to ten feet. There is a bird you don't see often. See him? Basking in the sunshine on that old muskrat house,—a male Summer duck. What a beauty he is! In my opinion the handsomest bird that visits the North. He sees us now. Watch him how undecided he is; look how the colors seem to shine resplendently as the sunshine strikes them. What are you doing? No, you don't! Drop that gun. There are ducks enough to shoot without molesting him. Away he goes, little knowing his narrow escape. Don't feel hurt that I didn't allow you to shoot; by not doing so you conferred a personal favor on me Oh, what's the use looking so inquisitively at me? If you want to know why I spared its life my only reason is a tender love for the bird. They are so inexpressibly beautiful, so affectionate, their gorgeous plumage always seems to me to light up the dull marsh with such surprising beauty, that I just haven't the heart to shoot them. Do you think me effeminate? I hope not.

We are getting among them now, they rise from the marsh in countless numbers,—what a sight! All kinds and sizes; the deep sullen roar of their wings their loud quacking, the sight of so many so near, just out of gun range, fill us both with thrilling, anxious expectation. It doesn't take long until we are in their retreat, set out the decoys, fix the blind, and are making sad havoc with them. At times, they come with great frequency and regularity. This is easily accounted

for; there are some constantly in the air, those coming first set their wings, coming in to the decoys; somewhere in sight of these, but unseen by us, are others, perhaps a mile off. They see their kind circling around or alighting, and go where they are; others see these and do the same. Thus while we see but few coming in, several different lots are approaching us at different distances, from various points. This is how it happens that one often kills anywhere from 6 to 15 birds, almost as fast as he can load and shoot. But why dwell on what we do for the next few hours? We have found their retreat, they come in from all directions, not sufficiently fast to heat one's gun, but with enough regularity to make it interesting, and not tedious by long waits between shots. We enjoy the sport, enjoy seeing one another make difficult shots, enjoy the keen air, the cool November day. As you look at your watch a surprised look is seen on your face, and much to your astonishment it is six o'clock. Faintly we hear the whistles sounding that hour in the adjacent towns. Do not let the excitement of the evening flight cause you to forget the absolute necessity of taking your bearings in the marsh, for when the shades of night settle on the swamp, you will be lost for the time being, and your lack of forethought may force you to pass the night in your boat. Mark the way you came in by some tall tree, or bluffs, that you know in the darkness will loom up against the sky, or any other way that you can depend on. If in a strange marsh, or in unknown woods, don't take any chances; for unless you have experienced it, you can form no accurate idea of the perfect blank your whole surroundings will present. Better lose the late shooting

than take any such chances; besides, if you expect to shoot in the same spot the following day, it is much better to depart before dark and allow the birds to settle there in the twilight undisturbed for the night, they will decoy much better on the morrow. If you stay until pitch dark, the flames from your gun frighten them much more than any reports they hear during daylight. In the daytime they expect it, but when night comes, and once they are driven from their roost, they avoid that spot in the future.

Where we are now is perfectly familiar to me, and we will stay till dark. We will gather up the decoys now, for soon darkness will be on us, and we cannot do it then; besides, decoys in the faint light do but little good. When ducks come in in the twilight, they come to spend the night, never dream of danger, and swoop in with a swish that shows their fearlessness. Come, now that we have picked the decoys up, we will cross over and stay until dark, on the east edge of the rice, facing the west; because the reflection of the setting sun on the sky brings the birds plainer to view. Look to the west! See how bright the sky is; how beautiful after the setting of the sun! Notice those tiny clouds. From here they seem but a trifling height above the horizon, their under edges touched with crimson and gold, their centre of lavender and black, while their tips seem of crustated whiteness. Turn around now, look to the east, and see the contrast. No bright colors, no brilliant contrasts; simply one gray, dull, and lifeless pall overspreading the earth. For a few moments we are kept busy firing at the incoming ducks, each striving to drop them into the open water. They come in from all points of the com-

pass in perfect recklessness, the "whewing" of their set wings vibrating through the air. No need of blinds now, no opportunity for calculating shots; but we see a dark meteor shoot hastily by, fire quickly, then listen for the expected splash we know the duck will make as it strikes the water. Unexpectedly one drops into the water within ten feet of us. We dare not shoot, knowing, if hit, the bird would be blown to pieces. We splash the water, still unseen and unobserved by the duck; then we speak. At the sound of human voices we see the water slightly ripple as the duck rises, a dark shadow for an instant, and the bird seems to dissolve in the darkness. As we pick our way through the swamp you recognize your helplessness in this dark, strange place. But guided and directed by our never-failing friend—the North Star—we emerge after an hour's hard and patient work on the Mississippi River. We cross over to Camanche, from there take the steamer for home, tired, hungry, and happy, well pleased with our day's sport, and mentally deciding who among our friends will be favored when we make a division of our 112 ducks.

CHAPTER XII.

SHOVELER, OR SPOONBILL.

THE Shoveler or Spoonbill duck is a frequenter of almost all Western waters. They are a queer-looking bird, and once seen will not be readily forgotten. Their bill is a peculiar one, being like some streams, both broad and deep, and appears like an abnormal development added to their otherwise pretty shape. That nature has aided them with a bill different in its formation from any other is apparent, but the wherefore is beyond my comprehension. Possibly, the sins of their parents have been visited upon them, and those we have among us are of the third, may be of the fourth generation, and they are compelled to suffer by reason of the sins committed by their ancestors. If so, Nature has certainly prepared them to shovel their way through, for she has given them a bill spoon-shaped, with which they can dig, shovel or scoop as they desire. I remember the first one I saw. It was a female. After it was shot, the dog retrieved it. I thought it was a young mallard, and casting an astonished look at it, my tender heart softened and I wondered how this young mallard had flattened out her bill ; but my experienced companion soon set me right, when he told me it was a shoveler ; that the bird was worthy and deserving of the name was unquestionable. Its great bill proclaimed it with silent eloquence. This then, was the plebeian of

the duck tribe, a tiller of the soil, a granger ; and nature had furnished it with never-failing tools. The little teal, with its fire-shovel of a bill ; the canvas-back with its spade ; the mallard with its common shovels ; were all insignificant in the rice beds, when compared to the scoop-shovel of the spoonbill, or shoveler. When it comes to digging in the mud, it is the section boss of the swamps, and all the rest of the ducks swim or waddle to one side when one of these little fellows gets his every day clothes on, and scoops and shovels among the roots and tender grass. They recognize him as an artist in this line, and accord him a fair field, but no favor. He has no competitors for speed and displacement of soil, for they all know full well, that they are mere infants with wooden spoons compared with him, when he brings into active operations that post-borer of a bill, propelled by such expert motive power.

The shoveler duck frequents marshy places, and is readily decoyed and easily killed. Their flight is swift, usually huddled together, and many may be killed at one discharge of the gun. When frightened, they spring from the marsh perpendicularly like the pin-tail. No. 6 or 7 shot are the proper size to use.

Anas Clypeata. The Blue-winged Shoveler is twenty inches long, and two feet six inches in extent. The bill is brownish black, three inches in length, greatly widened near the extremity, closely pectinated on the sides, and furnished with a nail on the tip of each mandible ; irides, bright orange ; tongue, large and fleshy ; the inside of the upper and the outside of the

lower mandible are grooved so as to receive distinctly the long separated reed-like teeth ; there is also a gibbosity in the two mandibles which do not meet at the sides, and this vacuity is occupied by the sifters just mentioned. Head and upper half of the neck glossy, changeable green ; rest of the neck and breast white, passing around and nearly meeting above ; whole belly, dark reddish chestnut ; flanks a brownish yellow, penciled transversely with black, between which and the vent, which is black and white, is a band of white ; back blackish brown ; exterior edge of the scapulars white ; lesser wing coverts and some of the tertials, a fine light sky-blue ; beauty spot on the wing a changeable, resplendent, bronze green, bordered above by a band of white, and below another of velvety black ; rest of the wing, dusky ; some of the tertials streaked down their middles with white ; tail dusky, pointed, broadly edged with white ; legs and feet, reddish orange ; hind toe not finned.

The female has a crown of dusky brown ; rest of the head and neck, yellowish white, thickly spotted with dark brown ; these spots on the breast become larger and crescent shaped. Back and scapulars dark brown ; edged and centered with yellow ochre ; belly, slightly rufous, mixed with white ; wings nearly as in the male.

See, Morris' British Game Birds p. 261 + pl.

CHAPTER XIII.

BLUE-BILL (SCAUP-DUCK, BLACK-DUCK, BROAD-BILL.)

THE Blue-bill, or Scaup-duck, is well known throughout the Western States. Locally it is known as the blue-bill, a name which explains itself; its bill being a light blue, and a conspicuous marking of the bird. It is sometimes, and not infrequently, designated as the "black-head," a name given it because of its round, black head. The name scaup-duck is used but little, if at all, in the West, notwithstanding the fact that their first and best known name was "scaup-duck." This name was accorded them because of their propensity and fondness for scaups, or snails, and broken shells found along the sea-shore. On inland waters they are deprived to a great extent of these delicacies to aid digestion, but find a few along the shores of lakes and rivers. In the West we cannot see that they suffer for want of these harsh substances, with which their craws are filled, for they substitute gravel and sand enough to fill any void that could be found in their stomachs. Their food consists of acorns, buds, wild rice, corn, and such other food as mallard and other ducks feed on. They are essentially open-water ducks, and like to sit in open and broad water, where they can rest in apparent security from the intrusion of prowling hunters along the shore. In their habits in this respect they are similar to canvas-back and red-head, although they

are entirely lacking in the shrewdness and caution displayed in the canvas-back and so frequently in the red-head. The blue-bills are the little salts of the open streams. Tough and hardy, loving rough and inclement weather, they are found in the most turbulent weather floating on the crested waves, bobbing up and down with each swell, looking like big black corks, so far out are they in the open water. They are restless little fellows, and often fly without any definite idea of what they are flying for, or where they are going to. They simply like to be on the move, seemingly self-appointed committees of investigation whose duties are be on the go continuously. This is especially noticeable on stormy days, or when the wind blows strong and raw. On bright, warm, still days, when the sun beats mildly on the calm water, the prevailing spirit of indolence, so catching to human life, is contagious with them, and they float idly on the surface of the open lake, or are carried down by the swift flowing current of some rapid river, huddled closely together in a black, blue, and white mass of soft feathers, with their heads hugging their breasts with quiet contentment.

I have seen them this way in the open Mississippi, carried along with the current, first approaching, then receding from the river bank, as the changing current would swerve and turn from sand bars and ice. On, on, they would float, until time and tide would bring them near the habitation of man. They would see the houses along the shores, hear the busy hum of life and activity, the buzzing and rumbling of mills,—and away they go, flying up stream for miles, then quickly drop into the centre of the river, and float down as before. These manœuvres are common in the spring, just as the ice

breaks up and floats down the river. The ice parts from the bank, and stretches into black and white cakes from shore to shore; it rubs together, clashes and crumbles, piles over and surges under, forming ice-floes of every conceivable size, description and shape. Then it is they are enjoying themselves the most, and, clambering into one of these floes, in immense droves or flocks they will float down the river in indolence, taking things easy, while receding banks and trees form a panorama that seems very enjoyable to them. Then it is that the hunter standing near an inland pond, or secreted in some well protected blind, wonders what has become of all the ducks, and plays with his gun or consoles his dog, with the assurance that it will soon be four o'clock, and then the evening flight will surely begin. At this same time the hunter in the scull-boat is helping himself to the cream of the day. By stealthily propelling his scull through floating ice, with his boat loaded with ice, resembling an ice cake, he guides it lithely, stealthily, and in a serpentine manner through narrow channels of great cakes of floating ice, and kills duck after duck. While they enjoy this floating down the river, it is simply a diversion from the more laborious, yet necessary part of their existence, viz.: earning a living. In the wide, deep river they find nothing to eat, neither do they try. They simply come here to have a picnic and doze the time away. After enjoying their fun, they settle down to business, and repair to the ponds, little lakes and shores, there satisfying their sharp appetites. Then is the time to shoot them over decoys, and decoys in profusion should be used,—the more the better, as the water will be from three to ten feet deep. Wooden decoys must be used. They should be placed in the open, plainly

in sight, and if the stream is narrow, say seventy-five yards, set your decoys well away from you, that the birds may light between you and them. Make yourself a blind. Be sure it is not so high as to interfere with your shooting. Of course this suggestion applies only where one is shooting among brush or trees. It is not necessary to build a dense blind, impenetrable, but just make one that will protect you fairly well, and then refrain from moving. That is the secret in getting them to come. If one stands still, a very small blind will do, as their eyes are wholly occupied in looking at the decoys, and they are bent in getting there as quickly as possible. But if you move, your lack of caution is very apt to deprive you of a shot. No nonsense with them; life is too short to be spent in sailing around, investigating and inquiring whether or not all things are right; so they come for the decoys low over the water, like a flash, steadily and quickly, and almost before you know what is up, and often before you can catch aim on one, their feet are extended like open palms of the hand and they slide into the water, plowing it ahead of them in tiny waves, almost at your feet. Watch sharp! For they are apt to leave you without ceremony, and as quickly as they came, for those keen eyes you see through your blind have a suspicious sparkle in them. Aha! Away they go! Look at them, every fellow for himself. That's the way they start out; and see how soon they get under full speed. They are about as quick as any bird that flies; besides, they are hard to hit, and hate awfully to die when they are hit. They are expert divers, and when one is crippled, it should be shot at once. I candidly believe they will stand more punishment than

any other duck. They like to alight up-wind, and always do so. Should they come down-wind, they will come with speed almost incredible, and with set wings will pass swiftly by and over the decoys, apparently with no intention of returning. This is simply a ruse of theirs, for after flying perhaps seventy-five, possibly two hundred, yards, they will whirl, and coming up-wind, come low over the water and afford excellent shots, right in easy killing distance. When they attempt this flight, coming swift as an arrow past you down-wind, don't allow the temptation to get the better of your judgment, and foolishly fire at them. Be calm, and wait for their return. As they pass you, cluck at them. This produces a sound similar to the bird in feeding, and has an excellent effect on them, making them less suspicious. Should your bump of self-esteem be unusually well developed, and although an amateur duck-shot, you have a local reputation as a trap-shot at inanimate targets, try one of these single fellows, coming with the strong wind, when from an elevation of seventy-five yards he suddenly concludes to come down and light among the decoys. His height is too great to make the descent at once,—he knows it, and forcing himself to his greatest speed, he sets his wings, and darts toward the water, then slightly curves his wings, forming a deep, crescent-shaped bow, and fully forty yards from you and thirty-five yards high you seek to bring him down. No time for judging height, velocity, or anything requiring thought, no matter how quickly it can be made, for you see descending a short, plump body of black, blue, slate and white, and like a shooting star he goes past, and you can almost imagine a faint blue streak following him as he passes you. As

he flies by, dropping at an angle of about thirty degrees, he presents the most difficult shot imaginable to make. The twisting, writhing snipe isn't to be compared to him; you can wait on the snipe until it steadies its flight, but the longer you wait on a blue-bill, the worse you are off. On such a bird one must "let drive" quickly; hold as near as you can guess about two feet under, four feet ahead, and you *may* hit him. If you don't, rest assured, he couldn't be hit shooting in any other way. Should you have the satisfaction of seeing him double up, throw his head on his back, and drop like a chunk of lead, his dead body carried by the inertia of his now still wings, following the same angle he mapped out when alive, you can illuminate your blind with your sweetest smile, pat your dog fondly, and mark my word, if the dog is an old duck retriever, you will plainly see in his honest eyes an expressive feeling, showing he appreciates the shot. Don't try this shot too often, lest you fall from grace in the dog's estimation. I know of no way in which the conceit will so quickly, so surely, be taken out of a man who thinks he is a good shot, as to let him try a few of these shots in the presence of an old duck-hunter.

As the birds begin to come into the decoys, they will fly against the wind, fearlessly, but swiftly; then keep cool, hold well ahead of them and always try to get one with each barrel. If you are anxious for a big "bag," and don't care just how you make it, let them light and get two or three in range for the first barrel, but if you are out for recreation and fun, don't let them light, but just as they are about to light, with wings fluttering and feet extended, coolly and quickly draw aim about a foot ahead of some bright-eyed, black-

headed, blue-billed drake,—and see how dead you can kill him; then swing your gun quickly, catch his mate, and you will feel more pleased at these two birds killed cleanly and prettily, than if you had killed half a dozen sitting on the water.

Nos. 6, 7 or 8 is the proper size of shot. No. 6 in flight, the other sizes over decoys.

SCAUP-DUCK.

(*Fuligula Marila*)

"Blue Bill," "Black Head," "Broad Bill."

Adult Male.—Bill as long as the head, broad at the base, and large and flattened toward the end, which is rounded; the frontal angles narrow and pointed. Head of moderate size; eyes small; neck of moderate length, rather thick; body comparatively short, compact and depressed; wings small; feet very short, strong, placed rather far behind; tarsus very short, compressed; plumage dense, soft, blended; feathers of the head and neck short and velvety, those of the hind head a little elongated; wings shortish, narrow, pointed; primary quills curved, strong, tapering, the first longest, second very little shorter, the rest rapidly graduated; secondary, broad and rounded, the inner elongated and tapering; tail very short, much rounded, of 14 feathers; bill, light grayish blue; the ungins, blackish; iris, yellow; feet, grayish blue; the webs and claws, black; the head, the whole neck and fore part of the back and breast, black; the head and neck glossed with purple and green, the rest tinged with brown; hind

part of the back, rump, abdomen, and upper and lower tail coverts brownish black; middle of the back, scapulars, inner secondaries, anterior part of abdomen and sides, grayish white, beautifully marked with undulating black lines; middle of the breast white; wings light brownish gray; alula, primaries at the base and end, and greater part of secondaries, brownish black; the speculum of the latter white; length to end of tail sixteen and a half inches; extent of wings twenty-nine; weight 1 lb. 6 ozs.

Adult Female.—The female agrees with the male in the characters of the plumage and in the colors of the bare parts, but those of the former differ considerably. The head, neck and fore parts of the back and breast are umber brown; and there is a broad patch of white along the fore part of the forehead; the upper parts in general are brownish black; the middle of the back and scapulars, undulated with whitish dots and bars; the primary quills are grayish in the middle, and the speculum is white, but of less extent than in the male; the greater part of the breast and abdomen is white; the sides and parts under the tail umber brown.

Length sixteen and a half inches; extent of wings 28; weight 1 lb., 6 oz.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CANVAS-BACK DUCK.

THE Canvas-Back, while the best known of the numerous varieties of duck in certain localities, in others are comparatively strangers. In the East, in and around Chesapeake Bay, they have been known from the earliest recollection of the inhabitants. Their habits, their feeding grounds, their places of resort, the various devices and means to effect their capture, whether by toling, the captor benefiting by the inquisitiveness of the bird, the bringing them down in point shooting, the shooting them over decoys, from sink boxes, killing them from sailing boats, or the destructive way of slaughtering them during the night by poachers with enormous swivel guns, lashed to strong boats, burning heavy charges of powder and hurling with murderous effect the leaden hail into the sleeping ranks of the unsuspecting birds, killing scores of them at one discharge

while the wounded escape in the darkness to die a lingering death,—these methods are familiar to every reader of sporting literature.

In the West they are not so well known and are recognized as a *rara avis* when found along the Mississippi. On the inland lakes and rivers of the West they are frequently found, and goodly "bags" are made. Excellent shooting is had at times in Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska and other western States. At and around Ruthven in Iowa, when one is there at the proper time, it is no uncommon occurrence for one gun to get from 20 to 40 in a morning or evening's shooting. Once in a while it seems, as if by accident, they are seen flying up the Mississippi, or again, floating idly along with the current.

When the Western duck hunter, through a generous fate, is fortunate enough to enjoy one good day's shooting of canvas-backs, he is apt to remember it for years, if not during his whole life, for in the West, they are so scarce that one successful hunt becomes so emblazoned on our memory, that years cannot efface it, nor will time tarnish the pleasant recollections, for as years are added to our declining life, they seem to brighten and make more splendid those days spent in shooting canvas-backs. We cherish these memories, and love to have our minds wander back, reverting with satisfaction and delight, to the moments we sat hidden in our boats, with numerous decoys scattered around us, shooting the noblest wild fowl that ever spread wings, as they come in their wedge-shaped column, fearlessly over our decoys ; or, carried by their wonderful velocity, light just on the edge of the decoys with feet extended shoving small billows of seething foam, as they plow through the water.

Their extreme cautiousness is shown when alighting near decoys. They will come down wind like a rocket, fly straight as an arrow past the decoys, as if not seeing them, and when perhaps 100 or 200 yards past them, will suddenly whirl, and with a wide sweep, circle and without hesitancy slide into the water just out of gun shot. We see them look at the decoys as is if in wonder and surprise ; then they grow inquisitive, swim to and fro, gradually approaching the decoys, then they hesitate as if debating whether or not they had better approach any nearer. The drakes are exceedingly shy, but the ducks having their curiosity aroused, it must be satisfied, and crowding ahead of the timid males, assume the leadership, and the drakes (poor fellows) are led into danger and death by feminine curiosity. There is a moral in this, but fearing the wrath of my lady friends, I forbear to mention it.

They are a handsome bird, either flying or sitting on the water. As they fly along so swiftly, their long necks stretched out, the sun shining on their dark chestnut heads, the strong light brings into distinct prominence the changing colors of their necks and bodies, and they show up conspicuously, their feathers so prettily blending together, forming colors of deep-brownish chestnut and lightish gray, often relieved by snowy whiteness.

On the water they are equally pleasing to the eye as we see them sitting in some broad open lake, far from shore. Watching them unperceived we see them floating on its surface, idly, or with extended necks when the least alarmed,—their necks looking sadly out of proportion to their plump, short bodies. Their bills are made strong by nature, that they may forci-

bly tear asunder bulbs and roots from the deep bottom of the lake. Near them at this time we often notice the sly widgeon, constantly showing its thievish propensities. As the canvas-back appears on the surface, the widgeon rushes quickly upon it and snatches from it the sweet roots it dived so deeply to obtain.

The canvas-backs are frequently confounded with red-heads, and I have witnessed discussions between hunters who had certainly had experience enough not to confound them. They are very similar, but the similarity is more imaginary than real. The canvas-back is larger, its head darker, and its bill a deep black, while that of the red-head is deep blue or a slatish color, The shape of the bill of the canvas-back is wedged and long; of the red-head moderately long and concaved. These are simple distinctions to be remembered, and any hunter who fails to remember them is injustifiably ignorant. They are very tenacious of life, their bump of stubbornness being fully developed, and they will dive long distances, and prefer death by any other means than by human agency. When one is crippled, it will usually look around for perhaps a second, to see where the danger lies, then down it goes, and if rushes or cover are near, it is good-bye to that duck,—it will not be seen again. When one is crippled it should be shot again, and at once.

They will only decoy where they are accustomed to feed, or think there is food for them. At such places they come in readily. Decoys of their own kind are best, but red-head decoys are almost as good. To shoot them from a blind, the hunter should be concealed near where they are accustomed to feed, as far into the water as possible from the edge of the shore. A low

boat discreetly hidden in the rushes makes an excellent blind, but it must be well hid, and as near the open water as possible. The shooter requires a hard hitting gun; a 10 ga. is the proper size, loaded with 5 dms. powder, well wadded, and 1 1-8 oz. No. 4, 5 or 6 chilled shot, No. 4 being the best size. Being swift flyers, the hunter should hold two feet further ahead than his inclination prompts him to do.

Anas Valeineria. Fuligula Valeineria.

Adult Male.—Bill black, the length about three inches, and very high at the base; fore part of the head and throat dusky, irides deep red; breast brownish black. Adult male with the forehead loral space, throat and upper part of the head dusky; sides of the head, neck all round for nearly the entire length, reddish chestnut; lower neck, fore part of the breast and back black; rest of the back, white, closely marked with undulating lines of black; rump and upper tail coverts, blackish; primaries and secondaries, light slate color; tail short, the feathers pointed; lower part of the breast and abdomen white; flank same color, finely pencilled with dusky; lower tail coverts blackish brown, intermixed with white. Length, 22 inches; wing, 9 1-4.

Female.—Upper parts grayish brown; neck, sides and abdomen the same; upper part of the breast brown; belly white, pencilled with blackish; rather smaller than the male, with crown blackish brown.

Weight of male 3 3-4 lbs; of female, 2 3-4 lbs.

CHAPTER XV.

GREEN-WINGED TEAL.

(*Anas Crecca.*)

The Green-winged Teal are very similar to the Blue-winged Teal in their habits, but they are more hardy. They come later in the fall, and stay until the weather is very cold. Their cry is a peculiar one, being a shrill whistle, which can be heard a long distance through the calm woods. They are found along the mud banks of the rivers, resting quietly on the sheltered shore of a secluded cove, protected from the wind, and where they can enjoy the warm sunshine. I have often gone along the shore where overhanging willows afford excellent blinds, and in my boat slowly drifting or sculled along, have had splendid shooting, jumping them out in pairs from the driftwood along the shores, or as they flew from the grass at the water's edge. They are hardy little fellows and tenacious of life, being expert divers when wounded.

These birds often afford great pleasure to the young hunter, as they are the means of largely swelling the number of ducks killed in a given day. He finds an enclosed pond, where stillness reigns supreme, guided to the spot by the whistling cries of the birds. He crawls to the pond, and in the shallow water sees their little russet bodies moving along closely together, or with sleepy mien passing the time away, half waking and indolently blinking their eyes. The youthful Nimrod restrains as best he can his growing excitement, rest-

ing his gun against some friendly tree, sights and looks, then, fearing least his aim should prove faulty, sights and looks at them again. Feeling that his nerves are steady, his eyesight true, his gun is fired into the huddled mass, creating great slaughter, often ten or fifteen birds being killed at one discharge.

These birds are found in overflowed bottom-land, feeding on seeds and willow buds. They are swift flyers, and the shooter should hold far ahead of the moving bird. Like their blue-winged cousins they are delicious eating.

Adult Male.—Bill almost as long as the head, deeper than broad at the base, depressed toward the end, its breadth nearly equal in its whole length, being, however, a little enlarged toward the rounded tip; head of moderate size, compressed; neck of moderate length, rather slender; body full, depressed; wings rather small; feet short, placed rather far back; claws small, curved, compressed, acute; the hind one smaller and more curved; that of the third toe largest, and with an inner sharp edge. Plumage dense, soft, blended. Feathers of the middle of the head and upper part of hind neck very narrow, elongated, with soft filamentous, disuniting bands; of the rest of the head and upper parts of the neck, very short; of the back and lower parts in general, broad and rounded; wings of moderate length, narrow, acute; tail short, rounded and acuminate, of sixteen acuminate feathers; bill black; iris brown; feet light bluish gray; head and upper part of the neck chestnut brown; a broad band narrowing backward from the eye down the back of the neck, deep shining green edged with black below, under which is a white

line, which before the eye meets another that curves forward and downward to the angles of the mouth; chin, brownish black, as are the feathers at the base of the upper mandible. Upper parts and flanks beautifully undulated with narrow brownish black and white bars; anterior to the wings is a short, broad, transverse band of white; wings brownish gray; the speculum in the lower half, violet-black, the upper, bright green, changing to purple, and edged with black; behind margined with white, before with reddish white; tail brownish gray, the feather margined with paler; the upper coverts brownish black, edged with light yellowish gray; lower part of the neck anteriorly barred as behind; breast yellowish white, spotted with black; its lower part white; abdomen white, faintly barred with gray; a patch of black under the tail; the lateral tail coverts cream colored, the larger black, with broad, white margins and tips.

Length to end of tail, fourteen and three-quarters inches; extent of wings 24; weight 10 oz.

Adult Female.—The female wants the elongated crest, and differs greatly in coloring. The head and neck are streaked with dark brown, and light red; the fore neck whitish; the upper parts mottled with dark-brown; the anterior feathers barred; the posterior margined with yellowish white. The wings are nearly as in the male, but the green of the speculum is less extensive. The lower part of the fore neck is tinged with yellowish red, and mottled with dark brown, as are the sides; the rest of the lower parts white.

Length to end of tail, thirteen and three quarters inches; extent of wings, twenty-two and a half; weight 10 oz.

CHAPTER XVI.

AMERICAN WIDGEON—"BALD PATE."

(*Anas Americana.*)

Adult Male.—Bill nearly as long as the head, deeper than broad at the base, depressed towards the end, the sides nearly parallel, the tip rounded.

Head of moderate size, oblong, compressed. Neck rather long, slender. Body elongated and slightly depressed. Feet very short; tibia bare for about a quarter of an inch; tarsus very short, compressed.

Plumage dense, soft, blended. Feathers of the head and upper neck oblong, small; those along the crown and occiput longer; of the lower parts ovate, glossy with the extremities of the filaments stiffish. Wings rather long, little curved, narrow, pointed. Tail short, rounded and pointed, of sixteen feathers, of which the middle pair are more pointed, and project considerably.

Bill light grayish blue, with the extremity including the ungines and a portion of the margin black. Iris, hazel. Feet light bluish gray, the webs darker, the claws dusky; the upper part of the head is white, more or less mottled with dusky on its sides; the loral space and cheeks reddish white, dotted with greenish black; a broad band from the eye to behind the occiput deep green. The lower part of the hind neck, the scapulars and the fore part of the back are minutely transversely

undulated with brownish black and light brownish red; the hind part similarly undulated with blackish brown and grayish white. The smaller wing coverts are brownish gray; the primary quills and coverts dark grayish brown; the secondary coverts white, tipped with black. The speculum is dusk-green anteriorly, bounded by the black tips of the secondary coverts. The tail feathers are light brownish gray. The throat is brownish black; the lower part of the neck in front, and the fore part of the breast light brownish red; the breast, belly, and sides of the rump white; the sides of the body finely undulated with white and dusky; the rump beneath and the lower tail coverts black.

Length to the end of the tail, twenty and a half inches; extent of wings, thirty-four and a half; weight, 1 pound 14 ounces.

Adult Female.—The female is considerably smaller. The bill, feet and iris are colored as in the male. The head and upper part of the neck all around are white or reddish-white, longitudinally streaked with brownish-black. The top of the head transversely barred; the lower part of the neck in front and behind, the fore part of the back, and the scapulars are blackish-brown; the feathers broadly margined with brownish-red, and barred with the same; the bars on the neck narrow; the hind part of the back dusky; the upper tail coverts barred with white. The wings are grayish brown; the secondary coverts tipped with white; the secondary quills are brownish black; the inner, grayish brown, all margined with white. All the lower parts are white, excepting the feathers of the sides and under the tail which are broadly barred with dusky and light reddish brown.

Length to end of tail, 18 inches; extent of wings, 30 inches; weight, 1 pound 5 ounces.

The habits and peculiarities of the widgeon are similar to those of the pin-tail and mallard, although they do not frequent the timber as the mallards do, but prefer remaining out in the open field and prairies. When spring rains overflow low lands, spreading on the surface of the water the accumulations of winter, then one can expect to find the widgeon in large numbers, associating with pin-tails and mallards. They are an exceedingly shy duck to shoot on the water, either from scull or paddle boat; but when coaxed down by imitating their cries, they come down from great heights with graceful abandon, and perfectly unsuspicious of danger, drop softly in among the wooden decoys. They are an easy bird to kill when hit, and they seem to lack that vitality so noticeable in several other species of ducks. It isn't necessary to have decoys of the same kind, mallards doing almost equally as well. They are always in good condition for the table, and are most excellent eating.

No. 6 shot is the best size to use.

CHAPTER XVII.

GADWALL DUCK—GRAY DUCK.

(*Anas Streperus.*)

Adult Male.—Bill nearly as long as the head, deeper than broad at the base, depressed toward the end, the sides parallel, the tip rounded. Head, of moderate size, oblong, compressed. Neck, rather long and slender. Body elongated, slightly depressed. Feet, very short; tibia bare for about a quarter of an inch; tarsus, very short, compressed; plumage dense, soft, blended feathers of the head short, of the occiput and nape little elongated; of the lower parts glossy, with the extremities of the filaments stiffish. Wings, rather long, a little curved, pointed. Tail, short, rounded, of sixteen strong pointed feathers, of which the middle pair project considerably.

Bill, bluish black; iris, reddish hazel; feet, dull orange yellow; claws brownish black; webs dusky; head, light yellowish red; the upper part of nape much darker and barred with dusky, the rest dotted with the same. The lower part of the neck, the sides of the body, the fore part of the back, and the outer scapula, undulated with dusky and yellowish white; the bands much larger and semi-circular on the fore part of the neck and breast; the latter white, the abdomen faintly and minutely undulated with brownish

gray, the hind part of the back brownish black ; the rump all round and the upper and lower tail coverts, bluish black ; tail brownish gray, the feathers margined with paler. Length to end of tail, twenty-one and three-fourths inches ; extent of wings thirty-five ; weight one pound ten ounces.

Adult Female. Considerably smaller. Bill, dusky along the ridge ; dull yellowish orange on the sides ; iris hazel ; feet of a fainter tint than in the male ; upper part of the head brownish black, the feathers edged with light reddish brown, a streak over the eye, the cheeks, the upper part of the neck all round, light yellowish red, tinged with gray and marked with small longitudinal dusky streaks, which are fainter on the neck, the sides, all the upper parts, and the lower rump throat, that part being grayish white. The rest of the feathers brownish black, broadly margined with yellowish red. Wing coverts brownish gray, edged with paler ; the wing otherwise as in the male, but the speculum fainter, tail feathers and their coverts dusky, laterally obliquely indented with pale brownish red, and margined with reddish white.

Length to end of tail nineteen and one-fourth inches ; extent of wings thirty-one.

The Gadwall Duck is locally known as the Gray Duck, the latter name being the one it is almost always called by practical hunters. The ducks seldom frequent timbered country in the north, but much prefer open prairie ponds and lakes, marshy and grassy places to feed in. Their flight is similar to mallards, possibly a

little swifter, and they are often taken for the female mallard when shot at and this illusion is only dispelled after killing and picking the duck up. They decoy nicely in open ponds, whose shores are fringed with flags, grass or wild rice. Mallard decoys are best to use, except, of course, those of their own kind. These ducks I found plenty in the lakes of Dakota, in the early fall. In winter, they go south, and in late fall are found in abundance, seemingly more plenty than any other duck. Their call is very similar to a mallard's being finer, shriller, and not so vibrating and resonant. No. 6 shot is the best size to use. These birds die easily, and when crippled are not hard to capture.

CHAPTER XVIII.

QUAIL SHOOTING.

We stood in the marsh one day, Don and I,
He retrieving, ducks I killed almost in the sky.—
Great friends were we, chums, just like two boys,—
When a whistling quail coaxed us from our decoys.

OFTENTIMES in the sear and yellow fall, when October frosts have blighted the green summer sward, I have stood in the marsh, my faithful four-footed friend beside me, and he and I have looked away up on the hillside, where golden corn-stalks were bending to the breeze, where little thickets stood apart from one another in clustered bodies, and the osage hedges formed a line of impenetrable fence. At such times, the clear air bore to our ears the sweetest cry known to the hunter,—the call of the quail, whistling for its scattered mates. We looked at each other, and when I said to him, "Shall we go?" the bright, honest face, with its eloquent eyes, beamed on me *so* wistfully, no words

could more fully tell his secret longings. What a complete transformation in my companion! Before the cry of the quail, he stood in the swampy ground, cautious, immovable and on the alert, a perfect retriever. And now, after he finds that the utmost freedom is allowed him to scent, to point, to find the gamest little bird that ever spread wings, he springs forward, and with impetuous bound, clears bush and ditch, while ever and anon, he looks joyfully back as if to thank me for the pleasure or to chide me for moving so slowly. One of these halcyon days is so fresh in my mind, that I cannot resist the temptation to tell what Don and I saw, when the whistling quail coaxed us from our decoys.

> The dim, gray light of approaching day
> Warns the hunter to arise and not delay;
> For in the stubble, bushes or fence of rail,
> He will find the happy, vociferous quail.

The quail is semi-domestic in its habits. It loves civilization, and there is no place it likes so well as the sparsely-settled country, invaded by a few settlers or small villages, where the certain indications of rural life are shown by fields of wheat, barley, buckwheat, and the small clearings of the hardy pioneer. Around such places they live and rear their young. The female, with maternal instinct, seeks the place to rear her brood. She is a "squatter" in the true sense of the word. When she has found a place suitable for the comfort of her expected family, and for her lord and master a home, she pre-empts the land and settles upon it; and the male with his life will see that her homestead rights are protected. There is no establishment of this homestead by metes and bounds, as necessity requires in human laws but the divine law gives them a

territory for their dwelling place absolutely boundless, where they can wander at their own sweet will.

The selection of her nesting-place is made with great caution and care. She finds some quiet, secluded spot hidden from the eyes of man and prying boys, trying if possible, to keep her tiny nest and little ones hid from the cruel hawk, the prowling skunk, or the night-wandering and ghostly owl. The deep recesses of an old fence, where black-berry bushes twine affectionately around the decayed rails, or boards, are to her liking; bunches of grass, the warm sheltered and protecting hedges, offer to her inviting places to build her nest, to lay her eggs, to incubate, and to rear her young. This she is ready to do the latter part of May, at times earlier, depending on the season —instinct teaches her the proper time.

The eggs laid vary in number from one dozen to two dozen. The period of hatching is about four weeks. When the little ones are brought into the world they are filled with life, and are ready to start out on a voyage of discovery. About the first thing they do is to engage in a foot race, and this they do to the great despair of their fond mother, who with tender entreaty and a great deal of running manages to keep them together. Happy family are they; proud mother is she. The father bears his honors graciously. I have often seen this little family when hunting prairie-chicken. The dog would come to a point on a bunch of grass; the cock would fly away; then the mother, loath to leave her young and tender brood to the mercies of an enemy, would fly a few yards, and with fluttering wings alight and hobble away; would feign serious injury that she might divert the attention of the hunter

from her little ones, and would court death herself, rather than aught should happen to those she loved so dearly; they, frail, little things, would run chirping away with frightened cry, calling to their mother for protection, or, finding escape impossible, would hide themselves—bodies if they could, if not, their heads—in some bunch of grass; and how they would stare at one in blank astonishment, when picked up and stroked tenderly with one's warm hands. After they have been enjoying the emoluments and pleasures of this earth for perhaps thirty days, the mother reads the riot act to her lord, telling him how she had built them a home, had faithfully attended her duties, had hatched the brood, had fed and cared for them without complaint and without the expectation of reward; had brought them up almost to a condition of independence, and now she wanted him to do his share. He acknowledges the truth of her assertions, and accepts the situation, promising faithfully to protect them to the best of his ability, and to initiate them into the mysteries of how to keep out of the clutches of their natural enemies. The female then retires to her nest and brings up another brood the same season, and the male assumes entire control of the flock turned over to him. When it happens that an event occurs to drive the female from her nest, she will return; but should the eggs be handled by man or boy, then she deserts her nest forever. Should her nest be destroyed she leaves the place, and for a long time, days and weeks, will wander moodily around, or on some fence will dejectedly sit as if in the deepest mourning and despair; while her mate shows, as plainly as he can, the sympathy he has for her in her bereavement.

One would naturally suppose that after being reared in thickets and hidden places, that when quail have become grown and strong they would go to the same places to roost. Not so; after having reached the age of discretion, as it were, they flock together, and with one flight seek some open field, where, closely bunched together, they pass the night. It seems strange, that after having been bred and brought up in the depth of some quiet retreat, that when weeks had added strength to their bodies and acuteness to their natural instincts, that they should abandon these places, and seek the open and exposed field for their roosting-places, and yet the very openness of their roosting-place is an assurance of their safety, as night prowling animals and birds of prey skulking through the deep woods, or skimming phantom-like through the awful stillness of the silent trees, avoid the open fields. After alighting from their flight they huddle together, with heads pointing outward, forming a circle, and presenting to all quarters of approach a serried circle of pointed bills and black sparkling eyes. When disturbed, they fly up with a great whirr and roar, caused by the quick moving of their broad, strong wings, and each shifts temporarily for itself. Their manner of roosting is different from most other birds, in this respect: they do not sleep with the head beneath the wing. In roosting together as they do, it seems to inspire in them a spirit of confidence and fraternal affection, each relying on the protection of the other. With backs to each other they huddle and nestle closely together; the quarrels and fights of the day are forgotten and they commingle in sweet confusion. This they do in early fall, as well as inthe cold winter months. In winter they crowd closely together, bow

their heads to the blinding and drifting snow, and sit quietly until break of day, when they hustle out from their imprisonment, and set forth on their daily travels. At times, the snow covers them ; then comes the rain or sleet: the snow melts, then freezes. Alas! these changes are their death-knell. The frozen snow seals them hermetically in their beds. They struggle for liberty, find it impossible to regain it, and at last they give up in despair and creeping closely together, ignobly perish. Whole coveys are frequently frozen in this manner. In mid-winter, they brave the dangers of the woods, and to escape the fierce violence of the winter's storm, and the piercing, bitter cold, they huddle together in fence corners, clumps of trees, and thick underbrush, where they roost at night, and at break of day are potted by the unfeeling and implacable pot-hunter ; or, are seduced into captivity through the machinations of the bucolic youth and his figure four trap.

With us they remain through the entire year. Hunger drives them from the sequestered places in mid-winter, and they become partially domesticated, if left unmolested, and will come to the barnyard and gardens of the farmers, ever welcome and cheery visitors to the maternal wife and prattling children. Coming as they do, day after day, picking the corn and scattered grain in the farmyard, or especially favored with crumbs from the table, they utter their cheering call at break of day, and greet the early riser as he goes forth at dawn to tend his stock.

I have several times called at some farmyard, and after pleasant greetings with the lady of the house, enquired if there were any quails round. " Yes," she would reply " we have a flock, the children and I. Have had

them for two or three years. They come to us every winter, stay till spring; then, when the snow is gone, and the weather is mild, they leave us, but always return. In summer they breed and live in the orchard. We frequently see the little ones running around with their parents. But we don't disturb them; they seem to know us, and have so much confidence in us that we couldn't have the heart to injure them. It would cause much sorrow to the children and myself were these birds destroyed or driven away."

At such times I wish I hadn't asked the question; and bidding the kind-hearted lady good day, call my dog, and in deep thought wander aimlessly away.

In September the birds flock, and are ready about the middle of October to make fine sport. Their call is a familiar one, and I know of nothing similar to it, unless it be to call as if for some truant child, exclaiming plaintively, "Bob White! Bob White!" This is the call used by them early in the spring and through the summer. The male does this, while idly sitting on a fence post, or the lower limb of some scraggy tree, his partner at this time being fully occupied on her nest, always within hearing, and usually in sight of him.

Later in the season their call changes, and I have never heard at this time of the year any utterances from their throats that could be construed or twisted into "Bob White." Their call at this time being "Wah-ee-he!" "Wah-ee-he!"

When frightened at either man or dog, they utter a sharp, chittering sound, preparatory to flight,—not always, but at times. Look out for them then, for they will suddenly spring up, with a whirr and roar, that will rattle any one not possessing the steadiest nerves.

At such times, when alarmed, they will seek escape by flight, and run from the cause of their fright. Then, as if in doubt whether to fly, run or hide, show fear by erecting their feathers on the back of their necks, and tops of their heads. Be careful now, they will fly. When they do, try and make a double. At the same time, don't forget to mark them down. When you have noticed where they lit, locate the spot by some tree, bush, post or tall weed. Don't hurry to reach the spot, for if badly frightened they will remain stationary where they light, and clasping their wings close to their bodies, withhold their scent. This they have the power to do. Better wait a little, then they will get composed, and seeing and hearing nothing, will commence to search for their scattered companions. It is early in the day; time is of no consequence; remain still, and you will have an opportunity to study these little beauties. Keep silent! make no noise! How still it seems. One would positively aver that there was no feathered life within the sound of your voice, except that grim hawk, who sits on the limb of yon dead tree, out in the open field. Well he knows that he has selected a place of perfect safety. How you wish you were near him; or, if behind that old rail fence with your rifle, how easily you could pick him off. But hark! what's that noise? There reaches your ear a sound so sweet yet indistinct that you know not what it is or whence it came. Patiently you wait until you feel that your patience will go unrewarded. You are about to give up the hope of hearing it again, when it comes to you with greater clearness than before, and yet you cannot locate it. How sweet and low, still with what great clearness is it uttered. Now you know it is one

of the scattered covey calling its mate. Listen! With what caution he makes his love call. Together with his mate he enjoys solitude, but now that he is alone he is despondent. Note the mellowness of his cry, the pleading in his loving voice. He dare not call aloud, yet he wishes to be heard. Then, fearing that his pursuers may also hear, subdues his voice, as if frightened at its volume. Gently he calls again, "Wah-ee-he! Wah-ee-he!" He listens for that responsive call expectantly, then emboldened by the silence, desirous of meeting his mate, oblivious to the danger he may encounter, he moves from his hiding-place, and boldly steps forth in a slight opening and anxiously looks around. He sees and hears nothing, and feels satisfied his enemies have departed. He stares fiercely around, as if to challenge any intruder. He hearkens, expecting an answer to his call. His neck swells, his head is thrown back, as loud calls issue from his throat. Then, as if feeling perhaps that his calls have been too imperative, subdues his voice, and with tender accents calls for his lady love. Impatiently he waits for a reply. His mate, gentle, confiding little one, has been within hearing all the time; she would not hurry to him, lest in that haste, she might do an act inconsistent with her sex. She replies not to his many calls. When in angry disappointment he fiercely cries, she runs hastily toward him, regretting her coquetry and fearing his anger. Then again, when that fierce voice is tempered into sweetest music to her ears, she delays her coming that she may not appear too forward. Once again he raises himself to his full height, getting ready to make the woods echo and re-echo with his cries, but before he opens his mouth, a tiny form, dressed in gold and

mottled white, runs to his side. The fierce, proud look forsakes him; the fiery glance in that wild eye is softened; he gazes fondly, lovingly at her, and all is forgiven. The little flirt knew it would be. How pretty they look together, affianced lovers. Side by side they run from view. You look where they disappeared, soliloquizing: "When once the young heart of a maiden is stolen, the maiden herself will steal after it soon."

All around you now the air will be filled with joyous sounds, coming from the scattered covey. Now that you have them separated, keep them so. Send forth your faithful dog, and never regret the short time you lost in watching these birds unawares.

Whether or not quail are subject to domestication, *quære?* My experience has been they are not. The love of freedom is so thoroughly engrafted in their nature that no amount of kindness can offset to them the dearest thing on earth, liberty. I have tried all manner of ways, devised and carried out all kinds of schemes to bring them into mild subjection, but without exception have universally failed. Have carried home cripples, having stunned them with stones, or arrows when a boy; resuscitated them, bringing them out of insensibility by opening their mouths and breathing life into them; have gently caressed and kindly cared for them; kept them confined in roomy cages, supplied them with choicest food such as in their liberty they might possibly get; have constantly been in their presence,—thinking in this way, coupled with kind affection, I might win their confidence, but signally failed. To be sure, after a time, they would not flutter against the cage, or seek to escape from me, if I did not touch

HIS FIRST POINT.

the cage ; but it was love's labor lost, for the instant I left one at liberty he took advantage of it, and flew away, never to return. I have seen their eggs hatched by a hen, but they were no sooner from the shell than they would skulk and hide in the nearest wood-pile, under the walk, or any other place to avoid me.

There is one thing about quail, that I have never had explained or been able to understand, that is : the confused state they are in at times during their migrations. For they certainly do migrate,—not far, but their little bodies are filled with restlessness, with the desire to wander, and they make their nomadic excursions late in October, or early in November. Not always by flight, but at times in great flocks they will start out on foot, travel miles and miles, flying across rivers, alighting on land and running along very fast, as if on some necessary pilgrimage. Years ago, I have frequently seen them on these journeys, at the edges of villages, running along, each trying to keep ahead of his nearest competitors, then they would arise and fly into town, with the swiftness of a bullet, and the whole flock would be headed for some building. In the woods, their flight was never too swift for them to avoid the smallest tree ; but in town, they didn't seem to be able to steer clear of two-story houses, and with a dull thud their bodies would thump against the buildings in the line of their flight. This I have seen repeatedly, and have picked up as many as four from one flock, that had thus stunned themselves. After alighting once, they regain their accustomed vigilance, but boys, clubs, stones, bows and arrows, and ancient shot guns, used to sadly diminish their ranks. They were very plenty in those days, and I have killed as many as seven in

one day, with blunt arrows. I would now willingly tramp all day to kill as many with breech-loader.

Quail are very fond of grain of nearly all kinds, especially corn and buckwheat; and in such fields they will surely be found. They are fond of seeds, berries, and in old cattle paths they get the cream of their existence.

The old saying about "the early bird catching the worm" is true here. The early hunter is the successful one. He should start out in the gray of the morning, and when the sun is showing his genial face, banishing the frost from trees, grass and stubble, the keen dog should be widely ranging through expectant places, and his master should be no laggard. There is no sport excelled by this. The bracing, keen air, the tireless setter, the expected game, the broad fields, the panorama stretched before the hunter, clothed in purple, green, yellow and brown, all serve to make the hunt intensely exciting. Nature, touched by the withering hand of Jack Frost, presents a picture never to be forgotten. The constant anticipation of finding the hidden bird, the ceaseless watching of the bounding dog, as he leaps joyously forward, sweeping his silken tail to and fro over the grass, is a sight so grand that it fills the very soul of the hunter with delight.

> "When Autumn smiles, all beauteous in decay
> And paints each checkered grove with various hues,
> My setter ranges in the new shorn fields
> His nose in air erect; from ridge to ridge,
> Panting he bounds, his quartered ground divides
> In equal intervals, nor careless leaves
> One inch untried. At length, the tainted gales
> His nostrils wide inhale; quick joy elates
> His beating heart, which awed by discipline
> Severe, he dares not own, but cautious creeps,
> Low, cowering step by step, at last, attains
> His proper distance, there he stops at once.

And points with his instinctive nose upon
The trembling prey; on wings of wind upborne
The floating net unfolded flies; then drops,
And the poor fluttering captives rise in vain."

Seek the birds in the stubble, in the low underbrush, in the thick tufts of grass, in the lowlands, where small and scraggy trees abound, in the corn-fields, and, if you have a good dog and hunt faithfully, your industry will not go unrewarded. Mark well the divided flock, and if unable to find them, leave quietly, and return in an hour or so, and you will have them sure. They fly rapidly. Use a light 12 ga. gun, 3 1-2 dms. powder, well wadded, and 1 1-8 oz. No. 8 shot. On straight-away birds hold a little over, they are rising; on cross shots, *beware*, they are going very fast, hold well ahead. Shoot from one to six feet in advance of them, depending on their distance from you. Don't be afraid of shooting too far ahead, for when you do this once you will shoot behind twenty times. Risk any shot in reason, better shoot and miss than not to shoot at all; bang away at any bird you think is inside of sixty yards. Don't shoot too quick. You can kill a bird at forty yards, if you hold right; and you can't do it at twenty if you do not. Have a good dog; be patient with him. Always have plenty of shells along; and if you don't kill many birds at first, you will have a heap of fun, a good appetite, and will eventually feel well repaid. The best quail shooting I ever found was in Western Iowa, where Mr. Chas. Tate and myself bagged seventy-six birds in one day, both shooting over the same dog.

I have before me at this time a covey, seven in number. Life with these little beauties has been extinct these many years. Still, they stand before me as if liv-

ing, breathing, and enjoying animation. So true are they to life that we imagine if the glass door to their sepulchre were opened, with a loud whirr they would arise and flee from the hated presence of man. Four are males, three females. They are in crouched position, three pairs, while the odd one, an old cock, stands up in the majesty of his strength, the chosen sentinel of the little party, looking wildly around, as if to espy some hidden danger. Thus he stands, silently, grandly, while his companions, having implicit faith in his guardianship, pluck the berries from the tiny bushes and pick from off the ground the scattered seeds. The scene is true to life, one that every hunter of these birds has frequently witnessed. What a labor of love it must have been to the man who arranged the cage. Not only did he exhibit his skill as a taxidermist, but he displayed artistic taste that only could have been begotten of an inherent love for his chosen profession. The graceful attitudes of the birds, the bent, dried grass, the drooping bushes, from which dried berries hang suspended, the miniature trees, leafless and indicative of approaching winter; the moss-covered rocks, the sere and brown-carpeted earth,—all tend to show the skill of the taxidermist and the practical knowledge he must have possessed of the appearance, habits and resorts of these game birds. Sitting as I am in their charming presence, it gives me a double pleasure in inscribing with pen and ink a testimonial to their beauty and worth. What a thrilling sense of recollection they bring up to me, when with staunch pointer or steady setter I have hunted these strong flying birds. The sweet memories of years bring back the event as if it were but yesterday. Months, a decade of years, a

score of years, and yet, as I gaze fondly, admiringly, at the birds, I can distinctly recall happy hours spent among them. Time does not dim, but rather adds, to the memory of the past, and childhood's days arise before me so clear, indeed the happiest of them all, when I pursued these birds with hickory bow and feathered arrows.

When the Frost is on the Meadows.

When the golden summer 's over,
And a chill is in the air,
And the fields of wheat and clover,
Are brown, and bleak, and bare,
Then the hunter seeks his pointer,
Who comes bounding to his call,
For the frost is on the meadows
And the leaves begin to fall.

Through the meadows and the tangle,
And the woods along their sides,
Where the purple wild grapes dangle,
We walk with sturdy strides,
And we listen, almost breathless,
To the scattered covey's call,
For the frost is on the meadows,
And the leaves begin to fall.

"What do you scent, old fellow?
Ah! steady now; take care."
A twittering so mellow,
Then a quail whirls through the air.
A shot, "Go fetch him. Steady,
Or you will flush them all,"
For the frost is on the meadows
And the leaves begin to fall.

Don't talk of city pleasures,
The joy that money yields;
Keep all your vaunted treasures,
Give me the broad, brown fields.
The pleasures one can gather,
Can't be had at rout or ball,
When the frost is on the meadows,
And the leaves begin to fall.

F. M. Gilbert.

CHAPTER XIX.

DUSKY OR BLACK DUCK.

(*Anas Obscura.*)

Black Mallard in the West.

Adult Male.—Bill about the length of the head, higher than broad at the base, depressed and widened towards the end, rounded at the tip. Head of moderate size, oblong, compressed; neck, rather long and slender, body, full, depressed; feet, short, stout, placed a little behind the centre of the body; legs, bare a little above the joint; tarsus, short, a little compressed; hind toe, extremely small. Plumage dense, soft and elastic; on the head and neck the feathers linear oblong; on the other parts in general broad and rounded. Wings of moderate breadth and length, acute. Tail, short, much rounded, of eighteen acute feathers.

Bill, yellowish green; iris, dark brown; feet, orange red; the webs, dusky. The upper part of the head is glossy brownish black; the feathers margined with light brown; the sides of the head and a band over the eye are light grayish brown, with longitudinal dusky streaks; the middle of the neck is similar, but more dusky. The general color is blackish brown, a little paler beneath. All the feathers margined with reddish brown. The wing coverts are grayish-dusky, with a faint tinge of green; the ends of the secondary coverts velvet-black. Primaries and their coverts blackish

brown, with their shafts brown; secondaries, darker; the speculum is green, blue-violet, or amethyst-purple, according to the light in which it is viewed,—bounded by velvet black; the feathers also tipped with a narrow line of white. The whole under surface of the wing, and the axillaries white. Length to end of tail twenty-four and a half inches; extent of wings thirty-eight and a half inches. Weight, 3 pounds.

Adult Female.—The female, which is somewhat smaller, resembles the male in color, but is more brown and has the speculum of the same tints, but without the white terminal line. Length to end of tail 22 inches; extent of wings 34 1–4.

The dusky duck, or as they are called in the West, "black mallard," is very rarely killed here. It is essentially an eastern duck. Occasionally it strays away seeking pastures new, and the Western hunter is pleasantly surprised as well as gratified, when by chance he bags a few of these birds. They are about the size, perhaps a trifle larger, than our mallard, but in taste and habits appear identical. There are places in the West where they are fairly, one might say, quite plentiful; but this is the exception, and not the rule.

CHAPTER XX.

AMERICAN COOT—MUD-HEN, HELL-DIVER.

WEBSTER defines a fowl to be, "a vertebrate animal, having two legs and two wings, and covered with feathers, or down; a bird." This definition is far reaching and admits of a generous construction, and one needs absolute freedom of analysis in attempting to classify Coots—or, as we call them in the West, "mud-hens" and "hell-divers"—as wild fowl. The universal opinion of Western hunters is, that they are a harmless nuisance, neither fit for sport nor food. 'Tis true they are bipeds, winged animals, but are a poor excuse for meat—only to be tolerated when the larder is empty, and the cravings of a strong stomach demand flesh for sustenance. At such a time a person could shut his eyes, fix his thoughts far off, accept this food sent him in the way of manna, transfer himself to the days of Biblical times, imagine himself an Elijah, not fed by ravens, but feeding on mud-hens. Under such circumstances, a person ought to get along fairly well, providing he can keep his thoughts at all times removed from the existing condition of things. Perhaps I am incompetent to sit as judge, and condemn these birds, when an honest confession forces me to admit I never tasted them. My opinion is based entirely on hearsay,—incompetent in a legal sense, but in a gastronomical one, sufficient for all practical purposes. Frequently they are eaten by hunters, and with—so they say—great relish. They claim they taste some-

what similar to a duck, but are strong and rank. It doesn't add to the flavor by any means, that after the flesh has been hastily masticated, and is carried with the current of saliva down one's esophagus, that it leaves in the mouth an unpleasant taste of both fish and mud.

The only person I have really heard compliment them was an amateur hunter who carried several of them home, the result of his shooting, and ate them under the impression they were young ducks, although he was unable to acquaint his wife with the name of the species.

They are familiar to every duck-shooter, and it is unnecessary to describe them ornithologically. In the fall of the year, in late summer, one has only to visit any marshy, shallow place, where ducks in season frequent, and these dark blue, slaty-black little fellows will be seen in hundreds and thousands, their sharp white bills so conspicuous,—like a wedge driven into their head. They dislike flight, and will resort to every means of hiding rather than to escape by flight. They are strong swimmers and expert divers. For both purposes nature has provided them abundantly, as their feet are broad, legs long, and extend far back, in flight reaching behind them like a stork's. Their food consists of larvæ, rice, but chiefly of tender roots, which they get by diving down and tearing them from the mud. In habits they are fraternal, and affiliate together in large flocks, at times blackening the water, so plenty are they. While voracious feeders, they enjoy a good time, and some of them will wade out on shallow mud-banks, or clamber up on musk-rat houses, and sit for hours quietly dozing, while their companions in the water are industriously feeding, sipping, chattering, and uttering faint whistling sounds which are readily con-

strued into exclamations of content and satisfaction with themselves.

When a boat is seen approaching them, or a hunter is noticed on the shore, or comes through the rice-stalks, making a loud, rattling crashing sound, they compress their dark bodies to the earth, and slide and glide from off their pleasant dozing places through the rushes, and skulk along until they reach a place deep enough to swim; then they all head for the deep and open water, and swim in dense bodies, until they think they have reached a place of safety. If the young hunter wants to hear the report of his gun, and see the shot splash in the water, he can now do so,—they wont fly, but will just keep out of range. Mallards and other ducks appear to look on them with contempt, and do not seek their company. This is no cause of offense to the mud-hen, and they go where they please in perfect indifference as to whether or not they are welcome. When forced to fly they present a very pretty target as they go past. Their flight being regular, steady and about the swiftness of a mallard. As they arise from the water they present a ludicrous appearance. It takes them a long time to get under headway. They start, the tips of their wings beating the water, instantaneously their feet get in motion, and off they go. First their wings avoid hitting the surface, then, for perhaps 30 or 40 yards, their feet kick the water behind them, presenting to the eye of the observer miniature waves and tiny billows of sparkling white-caps, which soon disappear and dissolve, commingling with the body of the lake. Do not allow them around your decoys,—they will keep ducks away; but drive them out by showing yourself, or occasionally shooting at them.

CHAPTER XXI.

BUFFLE-HEAD DUCK—BUTTER BALL.

(*Fuligula Alveola.*)

Adult Male.—Bill much shorter than the head, comparatively narrow, deeper than broad at the base, gradually depressed at the end, which is rounded.

Head rather large, compressed; eyes of moderate size; neck, short and thick; body compact, depressed; feet very short, placed far back; tarsus very short, compressed.

Plumage, dense, soft and blended; feathers on the fore part of the head very small and rounded; on the upper and hind parts, linear and elongated, as they also are on the lateral and hind parts of the upper neck, so that when raised, they give the head an extremely tumid appearance, which is more marked that the feathers of the neck immediately beneath are short. Wings, very small, decurved, pointed, and tail short, graduated, of sixteen feathers. Bill, light grayish blue; iris, hazel; feet, very pale flesh color: claws, brownish black; fore part of the head a deep rich green; upper part rich bluish purple, of which color also are the elongated feathers on the fore part and sides of the neck, the hind part of the latter deep green, a broad band of pure white from one cheek to the other over the occiput; the colored part of the head and neck are re-

splendent and changeable; the rest of the neck the lower parts, the outer scapulars, and a large patch on the wing, including the greater part of the smaller coverts and some of the secondary coverts and quills pure white; the scapulars narrowly margined with black as are the inner, lateral feathers; the feathers on the anterior edge of the wing are black, narrowly edged with white. Alula, primary coverts, and primary quills, deep black; the feathers on the rump gradually fade into grayish white, and those of the tail are brownish gray, with the edges paler, and the shafts dusky.

Length to end of tail fourteen one-half inches; extent of wings twenty-three, weight one pound.

Adult Female.—The female is much smaller; the plumage of the head is not elongated as in the male, but there is a ridge of longish feathers down the occiput, and nape. Bill, darker than the male; feet, grayish blue with webs of dusky; head, upper part of the neck, hind neck, back and wings grayish brown. A short transverse white bank, from beneath the eye, and a slight speck of the same on the lower eyelid. Six of the secondary quills white on the outer web; lower parts white, shaded with light grayish brown on the sides; tail dull grayish brown.

Length to end of tail thirteen inches. Extent of wings twenty-two one-fourth, weight eight ounces.

These ducks are among the smallest of the duck tribe, and are very seldom shot, unless from sport of shooting, or unless the hunter is having an exceedingly hard run of luck, and finds nothing else to shoot. They are very swift of flight, and as they go through the air

with incredible speed, their wings cut the keen air, and a whistling "Whew-u-u" is heard, attracting the hearer's attention. Being seldom molested, they become quite tame and present to the hunter easy shots on water, but more difficult when on the wing. Their food consists of larvæ, shells and seeds, and they frequent wooded ponds and gravelly shores.

See Morris English Game Birds p. 257 & p.

CHAPTER XXII.

RED-HEAD DUCK SHOOTING.

Low o'er the water in a bunch they come,
Brilliant in the sun that glossy head ;
We, in the sacred precinct of their home,
Rise, take aim, fire, then pick up the dead.

WITH the solitary exception of the canvas-back, epicures consider the red-head the finest eating of the duck family. They are readily and frequently mistaken for canvas-back by hunters of experience ; others have classed them as and believe them to be, a species of canvas-back. But such opinions are really without substantial foundation, as they are as distinct from the canvas-back as any other variety of duck, notwithstanding their similarity in appearance. At the first glance they appear much like the canvas -back, but a closer examination, indeed, a casual look to one who is posted and the difference is readily detected. Place a

pair, one of each, side by side, and a child will see the distinction. The bill of the canvas-back being fully three inches in length, high at the base, running wedge-shaped to the tip, and in color black ; on the other hand, the bill of the red-head is about two and one-fourth inches long, slightly concave, and in color dark blue or slate. If the reader will only bear this in mind he will never get mixed or undecided when he knocks one down and thinks he has a canvas-back, when in fact it is a red-head.

These birds are dainty but voracious feeders. They only want what they like, and when they find it, hate awfully to leave it, and will stand lots of shooting. What appears to tickle their palates most are the roots and blades of tender grass, wild celery, smart-weed, although they have no hesitancy in skimming floating seeds from the surface of some quiet pond; or, during an overflow, nipping the buds from the twigs amidst which they swim.

In the fall they are comparatively scarce, the spring being the season of their greatest abundance. The water being high on the Mississippi, excellent shooting may be had then. On the smaller inland rivers they are still more plenty, but only when the streams are swollen and set back, forming bayous and overflowing the adjacent bottom land. At such times, I have found them in great numbers and had splendid shooting, both flight and over decoys, in the deep woods of the Wapsipinicon river. This is a winding, tortuous stream, extending through the state of Iowa from a northwesterly direction, and emptying into the Mississippi twenty miles south of Clinton.—a treacherous stream, dull and lifeless, when the water is low; but when

snow melts in the north it booms and rushes and roars, carrying everything before it.

Once when shooting red-heads on this stream I picked my way out on a projecting point. I was there about two hours. During that time the river rose fully three feet, and but for a farmer I would have had to pass the night in a tree. Red-heads are as nice a bird to shoot as any duck in existence; their flight is steady, strong, and regular. They do not pitch and dart like most ducks, but fly compactly together, straight ahead, with great velocity. They should be hunted with decoys, as they come to them prettily. While one should use decoys of their own kind, canvas-back answer nearly as well, and they will come in to blue-bills. Frequently when coming in they will pass by as if not seeing them. This is often done while going down wind. If the decoys are seen, the ducks will usually circle and come back, alighting up wind. If they pass by, and the hunter thinks they haven't seen the decoys, he should make a low chattering or cackling sound,—not loud, just so they can hear. They will then be attracted to the decoys and return. Some hunters let them light and fire the first barrel while on the water. I dislike this method and catch them while wings are outstretched, and just above the water. Experience has taught me that the surest way to capture a crippled red-head is to kill it, and I always shoot them as soon as I learn they are crippled. It only takes from 1 1-8 to 1 1-4 oz. shot and is soon done. Don't chase them with a boat. They are strong swimmers, very sagacious, and great divers. Instinct teaches them to do anything to avoid human beings.

In placing out your decoys select some open spot

where they can be seen from a distance; avoid putting them in the shadow of grass, brush or trees. Keep them in an open space, and, if possible, so the sun will shine on them from the direction the ducks are coming from. This will make them conspicuous, and loom up attractively. Use all the decoys you have, the more the better. Large flocks allay suspicion. Build yourself a blind, not too high to interfere with your shooting; hide your boat, keep your eyes open, your tongue still, and if birds are moving, you will soon have business on hand.

Red-heads are scattered pretty well throughout the United States. The finest shooting I ever had was in the spring of 1883, on the Missouri river bottom, about four miles north of Missouri Valley, Iowa. I had promised my friend, C. C. Williams of that place, if he would telegraph me when red-head shooting was at its height, I would put in a day with him. He did so. We left Missouri Valley in the afternoon at four, drove to the shooting grounds, and at half-past four, my companion, McPherson and myself, with about thirty decoys, started out in a Bond boat. The spot was fully three miles from the Missouri river. It was in early spring, the snow had melted and the bottom land was overflowed for miles. The preceding night had been cold, and sheet ice to the thickness of half an inch had formed running from the shallow shore toward the deeper water some two hundred yards. McPherson pushed and I broke ice, and at five o'clock we were in our blind, with decoys set out. My companion was a man of acknowledged skill as a shot, but insisted that I should do all the shooting, as he had been enjoying it for some days, and he was resolved that I should

shoot to my heart's content. I had one hundred shells, McPherson twenty. Those he said he had brought along simply to shoot cripples. At six o'clock, just one hour from the time we commenced to shoot, I was out of shells. Mac. didn't have one, and we picked up between seventy and eighty red-heads that I had killed, besides, there were five or six swimming about with broken wings, that could not be gathered. Had McPherson and myself had plenty of shells, I have no doubt we could have killed two hundred in the same time. As it was, I don't believe I missed three out of the last twenty-five shot at. They would swing in on me and turn up their sides from twenty to thirty yards, and I just couldn't miss if I had tried. That was the greatest hour of my life among ducks.

Red-heads usually being shot over decoys, No. 6 is the size to use; that size, with plenty of good strong powder behind it will reach them in flight shooting, or when coming in over decoys, will lay them out effectually.

RED-HEAD DUCK.

Anas Ferina—Fuligula Ferina.

Adult Male.—Bill bluish, toward the end black, and about 2 1-4 inches long; irides, yellowish red. Adult male with the head, which is rather large, and the upper part of the neck all round dark reddish chestnut, brightest on the hind neck; lower part of the neck extending on the back and upper part of the breast, black; abdomen, white, darker toward the vent, where it is barred with

undulating lines of dusky; flank, gray, cloudy, barred with black; scapular the same; primaries brownish gray; secondaries lighter; back, grayish brown, barred with fine lines of white; rump and upper tail coverts blackish brown; tail feathers grayish brown, lighter at the base; lower tail coverts brownish black, rather lighter than the upper. Length 20 inches; wing 9 1-2. Female, about 2 inches smaller, with the head, neck, breast and general color of the upper parts, brown, darker on the upper part of the head, lighter on the back. Bill, legs and feet, similar to those of the male. The weight of the adult male is about 2 1-2 pounds, and that of the female, 2 lbs. 7 oz.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SCIENCE OF SCULLING WILD FOWL.

To become an expert in the art of sculling wild fowl, one must be thoroughly versed in it scientifically; for it is a science, and a complete knowledge of it can only be obtained by hard work, constant practice and a desire to become proficient in the science. He should never get disheartened or discouraged; nor must he for a moment think of failing in his attempt to learn. He should always remember, "That in the bright lexicon of youth, there is no such word as *fail*." It is sorry work for a beginner, and as he sits in the stern of the boat, attempting to scull, the oar *will* slip from him, and obstinately refuse to catch the water right, in spite of his most careful strokes. Then, after he has faithfully and diligently practiced for, say half an hour, pains will shoot through his side, caused by his cramped position; his wrists will ache and he will be completely tired out; then, after he has caught the stroke, how difficult to keep the boat from rocking. To get the power, he throws the weight of his body on the oar, then the boat feels it; he tries to get the motion of the boat stopped, but the more he tries, the harder the boat rocks, and then its swish, splash, swish, splash, as the boat rocks in the water, sending great waves from its sides, and the only way he can stop it, is to quit sculling, and let the rocking gradually subside until it entirely stops. The scull-boat is, one

might truthfully say, a deep-water boat. While it is light of draught, still the power so essential to give the propelling force can only be had where the sculling oar can have ample room to work, and it ought to have at least three feet to work in; although in still water, or where the current is running lightly, one can get along nicely in two feet of water. The water should be free from stumps, logs, rice spots, roots and moss. If the sculler gets in where his oar is constantly stopped or impeded, he cannot work with satisfaction, for the steady motion is lost, and his oar loses control of the boat.

The sculler sits on the larboard side of the boat, on some hay or an old blanket. The sculling oar is run through a hole about two and one fourth inches in diameter, in the stern of the boat; the oar is bound with leather where it works in the hole, and is from six to eight feet long, depending on the taste of the sculler, some liking long, others short oars. First thing the sculler does, is to see that the boat is properly trimmed or balanced. If he is alone, he puts weight enough on the starboard bow to offset his own, as he sits on the opposite side. Grasping the oar in both hands, he holds the stem or handle of the oar on a level with his body, and shoves the handle from, then draws it to him, turning his wrists a trifle each time as he reverses the motion. This gives a lateral movement to the blade in the water, and he gets his power by shoving hard on the oar as it goes from him, and drawing equally as hard as the handle approaches him. The body of the water is the resistance, and whether the oar goes from or to him it *lifts up* against the dead weight of the water, and the twisting of the wrists turns the blades just a

trifle so its edges cut the water going and returning. This shoves the boat ahead as if pushed from the stern. An expert sculler will drive the boat along with such steadiness that were one to shut his eyes and sit in the boat, he would hear no noise, feel no motion, although the boat is going quite fast. It must be borne in mind, that the sculler should always have absolute control of his boat; that is, to constantly send it steadily forward. So steady indeed, that the slightest rocking of the boat will not be seen or felt, or the smallest ripple made as it moves, one might say as it skims, over the surface of the water. The sculler never loses control, whether he is near game or drifting down with the current. His hands or hand, is constantly working the oar, quite gently perhaps, still, just sufficient to feel the power at the end of the blade, and to always have it at his command. After years of experience one does this instinctively. As by constant practice one becomes proficient in the art of sculling one of these small boats, it is surprising how one's skill will become developed, until an expert duck sculler will scull with both hands, or one hand, while half reclining or lying on the flat of his back.

In my experience of a lifetime in hunting wild fowl I have used all kinds of duck-boats, and I never yet found a man who, after using one of these boats, would use any other. They are light of draught, can be rowed or pushed anywhere, are light of weight,—mine weighed when new 105 pounds,—are perfectly safe, and there is no danger or risk in using them anywhere. I have crossed the Mississippi in one, when the south wind had lashed the broad river into a sea of seething, hissing foam, as it rolled and flew into spray from the

crest of the big "white caps"; have stranded on sunken logs, while the swift running current of the Wapsipinicon river would spin the boat round and round like a top, have had the current swing me into fallen trees; have had the boat bump against logs and banks with a force that would threaten destruction to the whole outfit,—and yet, I never had an accident. The boat is broad and low, the water may break over the bow, and run in a stream over the bow and sides, but the combing of the cock-pit will keep it out, and a little sprinkling is the most inconvenience I have experienced at any time.

My attention was first called to the absolute safety of these boats when a boy. Having at that time implicit confidence in my abilities as a swimmer, I would often court an accident in one of them. It would be in the warm summer time, when dressed in linen pants, shirt waist, and bare-footed. At that time, with a companion equally as reckless, we would go out in the roughest part of the Mississippi, in the highest winds, greatly to our pleasure, but to the terror of kindly disposed old ladies, who watched us from the shores or steamboats. These boyish excursions bred in me a spirit of confidence in the sea qualities of these boats that I have always remembered.

In my experience, they are far ahead of any style of hunting boat yet discovered, except in thickly tangled wild rice—then they are bunglesome, and of little account, because of their great width. They are not a speedy boat, but row easy; their shortness rather holds them back, and they do not follow the stroke like longer boats.

We see advertised "hunting skiffs," "bow-facing

oars"; then a hunter of experience will write on "jumping mallards" by paddling. All very good, provided one can get nothing better. But these methods can hardly be classed in the category of skill, when compared with sculling. As an illustration, let a man come down some winding stream in a boat, with bow-facing oars, or paddling his boat. If the stream is crooked and narrow, with overhanging willows extending from the bank into the main stream, then he will jump a good many birds, coming on them suddenly around sharp bends, driving them out from the edges when they are in the grass, smart-weed, or among the willow twigs, or along sloughs where the bottom grass, flags, or wild rice is high, and the channel narrow. Under such conditions he will meet with good success, but the scull-boat will work *equally* as well there. Then change the conditions into a wide running stream, where the eye can see the water in an unbroken line for a half mile, perhaps a full mile; where the ducks are feeding, preening and sitting on the bank, basking in the sunshine. The hunter sees them, they see him. He cannot approach them by land; it is impossible to do so by water, because they will notice him long before he gets near enough to shoot. He takes in the situation at a glance, knows he cannot get near them, and deliberately routs them out. On such an occasion, note the sculler coming down, half reclining in his boat, the bow and sides trimmed with willow twigs and grass, to correspond with the shores he is passing. He comes down almost in mid-stream. The ducks see the object, but there is nothing alarming about it, nothing noticeable; the little of the hull that can be seen looks like a floating log, and the willows on top like sprout-

ing roots. The ducks feed on in quiet contentment, until the hunter is close enough to fire both barrels effectively. Again, take some overflowed prairie, where the back water from a neighboring stream is coursing over the ground, entirely submerging the grass in places, leaving ridges where pin-tails, mallards, and widgeon love to sit. When one can see them lighting, hear their quacking, and get a glimpse of the long necks of the watchful pin-tail, as it stands up showing its graceful proportions. All duck-hunters know the seeming impossibility of approaching such a place, and yet I can recall one bright afternoon when the timber, the river and the wild rice were deserted, when my companion and myself sculled into such a place, and lying in the bottom of our boat with grass sprinkled over bow and sides, we bagged fifty-eight in a few hours. Then again, coming down a stream, jumping ducks in any but a scull-boat, look at the position of the hunter and the shape of his boat. If he is rowing or paddling he cannot keep down out of sight. Usually he is sitting, and although he may think he is hid, he is far from it, and he can only get such shots as will be presented when the ducks fly from the willows; besides, his boat looms up high on the water, and is plainly seen, even if the shooter is hid. And then in a majority of so called duck-boats, he dare not shoot, except straight ahead, for fear of the recoil upsetting the boat. In a scull, he can shoot in any position, sitting, kneeling, or even standing; and he need never fear an accident, for I can assure him it is impossible to upset one of these boats. There is no feeling of insecurity in one of them, when one would constantly be afraid of something happening to cause an upset in the ordinary hunting-skiff.

Take in running water in the timber, with an ordinary skiff, there is a clanging of oars; you row a few strokes, and then jerk them in. First one, then the other pushes against a tree with an oar, then pulls a limb to help along; then grasps one tree to keep you from whacking against another. This is the way the ordinary boat goes through the timber, making a racket that scares every bird within a quarter of a mile. Note the difference with a scull-boat, going through the same place. The sculler in the stern sees all before him. The short boat is always under control. He guides it through seemingly impassable places, makes quick turns, avoids all obstructions, and moves along hour after hour without making a noise or hitting a tree.

It is remarkable how these boats can be handled by an expert. To show how noiselessly they can be run, I once sculled toward a mallard drake that was sitting on an old pile of drift-wood, half asleep. I tried to see how near I could approach him, and actually knocked him off the drift when the bow of the boat struck where he was sitting. It was amusing to see how frightened he was. Another instance to show how nicely one can hunt with these boats when others fail. A few years ago, in running ice, three of us bagged in one day 112 mallards and six geese. These were killed in the middle of the day, right in the channel of the Mississippi. At this same time, hunters in the islands were getting no shooting at all. The hunter in a scull-boat has an advantage over all others. He is generally in the open river, where he can see the flight on all sides, and mark the spot where ducks light in the pond, timber or rice, and is soon among them with decoys, and shoots them in that manner.

The sculler must be constantly on the watch, and, when coming down stream, the formation of the timber or the ground shows him that he is approaching a pond, bayou, slough, bed of rice, of smart-weed, or willow flash. He must drift or scull slowly, keeping the bow with blind headed toward the point he intends making; for the best blind is on the bow, and it is the most perfect shield.

No man can make a good duck-sculler unless he is thoroughly posted on the habits of the duck. He must know when and how to approach them, and to read their thoughts as they sit on the banks, or float on the water. This he does by their actions, and the expert can tell almost every time, long before he gets near them, whether or not he will get a shot, by the way they act while he is approaching them.

The scull-boat demands the best of care, and must not leak a drop. The bottom is half filled with dry hay; the sculler sits there for hours on the hay, and the boat must be in perfect condition. This requires careful attention, and when not in use, the boat should be kept under shelter, and thoroughly looked over and painted at least once a year—it is time and labor well spent.

How to trim a scull-boat for timber and overflow shooting, I have fully explained in the article "Sculling ducks on the Mississippi;" how to trim for ice shooting, in the chapter on "Canada Goose shooting." And now that you may see how we scull them in the wild rice, and where tiny lakes abound, imagine yourself comfortably seated on the hay in the bottom of the boat while I am both engineer and pilot. On the bow, we have placed a goodly sized portion of an old muskrat

house, and are working our way slowly through the crooked channel, made deep in places by the submarine inhabitants, whose houses we have despoiled for a blind. 'Tis in the fall, and as we go on unheard and unseen, reed-birds flutter up at our sides, jack-snipe utter their "Scaipe, Scaipe," and pitch down, alighting after a short flight. On the muddy shore, we see yellow legs teetering and wading; while again on the higher banks, cattle come down to drink, golden plover run and stop, then run and stop again, with indecision, yet with the greatest regularity. Over our heads there flies time and again great flocks of blackbirds, chirping and chattering, the dusky brown of the female looking subdued in color, when placed side by side with the glossy black of its mate, as he swerves up and down with graceful undulations, at all times showing the deep bright red on his wings fringed with scarlet and gold. We notice the king-fisher, as it goes along crying "chir-r-r-r, chir-r-r-r," then poises itself over the water, and drops like a bullet, disappearing for a second beneath the surface of the water, then springs up with a minnow in its bill and alighting on an old dead tree, looks at us as if to say, "wasn't that done slick?"

The open lake before us discloses its surface thickly dotted with muskrat houses and the shores lined with rushes. As the boat skims along, the pond-lily leaves lie flat on the water at either side, and the lake appears to be in possession, if not in control of mud-hens. See how they swim from us! their bright blue bills looking almost white in the sunlight. And look at them get up! It seems so hard for them to rise from the stream, and they fly from us splattering the water, kicking it from them, half flying, half running on the

surface, while they leave in their wake tiny waves that soon dissolve on the smooth bosom of the lake. We creep continuously along. The boat scarcely moves. It does seem, as if we ought to get up ducks here; everything is favorable to it, and—Aha! We both saw it at the same time,—down at our left in that thin grass a head arose, but for an instant, then sunk down. We know there are ducks there. We both sink lower into the boat; you lean forward, peering through the top of the muskrat blind, where we made a slight peep-hole with bended rushes. The boat goes a trifle faster. Right in front of us the mud-hens swim, just keeping clear of the bow. The ducks are on a narrow ridge of the lake, just out of gun shot from either shore. Look! Look! Feast your eyes on the heads and necks to be seen through the straggling grass, the pin-tails, and widgeon and a wild lot they are. The most difficult bird in the world to scull. They are looking at us, all suspicion. They are wondering what this muskrat house, so far out in the deep water is doing. Hear them chatter! We are about a hundred yards away and must now barely move the boat. They don't act right, are uneasy and I'm afraid they will—There! Just as I expected! All this work for nothing! Away they go! How we wish we were near them. I *do* like to shoot pin-tails, because—"Sh—down! down! Don't you see him, standing up right at the point where the others flew from." Strange he didn't notice you when you raised up to see those flying away. Isn't he a beauty! A male pin-tail. How he stands up, watching the float. Just look at his elegant position, standing as he is. He is frightened. Still, his curiosity has gotten the better of him; his long slender neck, and clean-cut body, with

that spiked tail makes him look like a thoroughbred, and he is one too. Isn't he grand, with his white breast so conspicuous in the grass? Watch him closely; when he starts he will jump straight up. Hold well over him, he is about sixty yards from us. See! How uneasy he is getting; watch him turning around; don't take your eyes off him. He is afraid to fly now,—No! There he goes! Give it to him! Bang, bang, goes both barrels. No need of the second, for your first did the work. You pick him up, and holding him by the bill at arm's length, admire his handsome neck, with its greenish-brown and purple-red, the snow-white of his breast, the slight cream color on his back, and the deep black so profusely scattered on his wings. Gently stroking his feathers, you lay him in the boat. You involuntarily sigh, as if it were a relief to draw one good long breath after this exciting time has past, and you say: "If I could only scull!" And why can you not? There is no patent on it; there is nothing so intricate about it that practice and patience will not overcome. There is no law written or unwritten, sacred or profane, that prohibits your learning, and if you will only learn, you will never regret it. For time and again opportunities will be presented when other hunters are sitting around camp, waiting for the evening flight. With a scull-boat you can have constant shooting throughout the entire day, in open water, along the edges of wild rice, among the willows and in places inaccessible to every hunter unless he is sculling, and my experience has proven that take two hunters, equally skilled as shots, set them hunting in high water, and the one with the scull will kill twice as many as the one without it.

If you are a young hunter, learn by all means to scull; if an experienced one, all the more should you learn to scull, then you will feel your education is completed, and you will be entitled to a diploma as a graduate in wild fowl shooting.

CHAPTER XXIV.

PIN-TAIL DUCK—SPRIG-TAIL DUCK.

(*Anas Acuta.*)

THE pin-tail, or as it is frequently called, the sprig-tail or sharp-tail duck, is one almost as familiar to Western shooters as the mallard. They are a particularly handsome duck, and their graceful proportions are admired more than any other of the duck species. They are swift flyers, when inclined to be so, and their long, rakish contour leads one to instantly decide that they have the requisite embodiments of all that is necessary for great speed. As they stand on some grassy knoll, with their long necks stretched up, showing the perfect proportions of their long, oval-shaped bodies, terminating at a sharp point at the end of their tails,

they have the wild, restless appearance of a race-horse, and seem as if they only waited the opportunity to show the speed that in them lies.

It is not possessed of the many brilliant and variegated colors of some other ducks, notably the mallard, and the summer duck, the latter being a bird of most brilliant plumage. Its variegated feathers, conspicuous by their lustre, blend so prettily together. We have often been lost in admiration, as we have watched a pair of these beauties swimming around some muskrat house, or on the verge of an old drift pile, calling so softly, so melodiously to each other, or whistling absent-mindedly as they skim off bugs, seeds and larvæ, or nip off the sprouting buds, as they glide so easily through the calm waters.

The male pin-tail is much more pleasing to the eye than its mate, being larger and finer looking in every way. The soft gray of the female is leaden in color when brought into strong comparison with the dusky slate, purple and white of her majestic companion, as he stands so alertly at her side, his tall head reaching far above that of the largest mallard. Her slight, trim form, slender neck and long wings denote that while she may be his inferior in beauty, she is his equal, if not superior in speed. And yet with all the power that nature has given them to make them among the swiftest of wild fowl, it is very seldom indeed that their swiftness of flight is brought into action. They much prefer depending on their bright, sharp eyes, and their selection of open and exposed places to insure them safety and protection. They are frequenters of the Western States, and are, one can truthfully say, spring ducks. They are with us in the fall, but their numbers

are limited. In the spring they come in countless thousands, and are the first ducks to arrive. Still they are not premature in their coming, for their barometer is so infallible that when they have once put in an appearance, experience warrants us in feeling that spring has really come, and the cold weary days of winter are over.

When the snow melts and little rivulets are running over the prairie forming broad open sheets of water, observable from all points, then these wary birds come, and alighting far out in the open, beyond the possibility of harm, sit and chatter the long day through. When the hunter, with the sky in the background, looms up plainly to view, they see him; he may try to get near them, but it is useless, for they fly long before he can get within gunshot of them. Their food consists of seed, acorns, corn and waste materials that the spring freshets float over the low lands. They are high-flyers, indeed the greatest sky-scrapers of the duck species. When they are frightened while feeding or resting, they rise to a height of from 80 to 100 yards, and then fly over the low lands and timber, just out of gun range. I have seen them flying this way for hours. How tantalizing they are! The hunter may stand in his blind, or lie concealed in some grassy spot; flock after flock will pass over him, just so high that he cannot reach them. They are not silent company, for they keep up an incessant chattering, and whistling. It is not possible to illustrate on paper just how this chattering is done, but a faint conception of it may be had by saying as fast as one can, "Chuck-a-chuck-a-chuck," repeating at least three times, the tongue must be glib, and it must run under 160 pounds pressure, as the

velocity to be acquired is very great. After practicing a while, so he feels he can do it with rapidity, let his wife try it, and her first attempt will convince him how exceedingly slow he is. As the hunter sees them flying over him, a variety of conflicting emotions flit through his mind. He believes patience is a monument of virtue, and *is* patient. He weakens as time passes, and not one comes near enough to kill; still they go over him, chattering and whistling, or turn their heads slightly and look down on him, as he feels, in derision. Getting desperate he begins shooting at them; shot after shot is fired, but without effect. He gets mad, and wishes he had a gun that would kill a mile—no difference what it weighed. But his desperation and disgust nerve him to greater deeds of valor, and by shooting from 16 to 20 feet ahead of a flock, he scratches one down, wing tipped. No sooner does the bird start to leave the flock, than the hunter starts for it like a race-horse. When he gets where the bird fell, he finds feathers but no bird. About this time the air becomes blue, and a heavy sulphuric vapor permeates the surroundings. He is out of breath from running. Accidentally looking back, he sees a large flock of pin-tails swoop right over his blind, not fifty feet high, the best opportunity of the day. He feels he could have killed half a dozen had he been there. Such luck! How he wishes he had not chased this crawling cripple. He sees the grass move slightly, pounces down upon it, and drags out the lost bird; clutches it around the neck, gives it a preliminary squeeze, while the poor bird makes a choking quack, then gazes at him in astonishment and affright. The hunter feels the impossibility of wreaking all his pent up revenge on this lone

bird, so deliberately wrings its neck, and then throws it at his feet in the blind.

In spite of their extreme wariness and their propensity to fly so high, they decoy nicely. They are on the best of terms with the mallard family, and at times travel with them, feed with them and roost with them. The pin-tail decoys are so neutral in appearance that it is not advisable to use them; besides, they must be natural, and to create that naturalness their necks must be slim. This means constant accidents by breaking necks off. As they associate so much with mallards, mallard decoys are the best to use, and as one will usually be shooting in shallow waters, it is better to stick up some of the dead pin-tails for decoys. How this is done is fully shown in the article entitled "Shooting Mallards in a Snow Storm." Don't be in too great a hurry to shoot, for they love dearly to circle around before lighting, and will stay up high in the air, fifty to seventy-five yards. When they do this, be calm, and reserve your fire, for unless they see you they will come down. All this time they will be whistling. Imitate their whistle; it is very simple, and always do it immediately after they do, as near like theirs as you can. Whistle often, throw feeling and expression in your tone; you want them to come, so be very solicitous in your call. Don't move in your blind, for their eyes are very sharp, and they will see you. When you fire the first barrel, look sharp, for they will be about thirty feet higher before you are aware and ready for the second. They are noted for being high jumpers, and will jump perpendicularly from twenty to thirty feet when frightened at the report of a gun. They are not hard to capture on the water, as when wounded

they usually swim with heads high up, or will tire themselves out by making one or two long dives. It is best to shoot them as soon as you see they are crippled. Try at all times to drop them into the water,—it is the surest way to get them, for if dropped in the wild rice or high rushes you cannot find them without a good dog, and it will test a dog's endurance and strength unnecessarily,—hence if you can shoot them so that they will fall into the open water it is decidedly the better way.

Always be on the alert, watching for them, for there is no telling when they may drop down, as if from the clouds, or what direction they will come from. If your blind is in the timber, your view will be obstructed for low-flying birds, so whistle their call occasionally, whether or not birds are in sight. You will find them quite erratic at times. Some will approach your decoys, circle and sail around, then when perhaps seventy five yards away, jump back in mid air twenty to thirty feet, as if thrown by a spring, fly away, come back again, and finally light outside your decoys, just out of range; when they do this rout them out, for swimming around as they will be, they will call other ducks away from your stationary decoys. At other times, they will decoy so nicely that they just won't keep away,—down they will come from extreme heights, with a waving, rocking motion, first the tip of one wing pointing vertically, then the other, as the duck reverses its position. This motion is nearly similar to a boy's pointing his right hand and arm up, his left to the ground, then reversing his position backward and forward, giving a peculiar swinging motion to his head and body, all the time pumping one arm up, while the other must at the same time go down.

The time to shoot at them is just as they are fluttering to light. They are then stationary and easy to hit; but after your first barrel is fired, look out for high and lofty tumbling, for they will rise with a jump. So be prepared, and hold high over them, and give them the second barrel as soon as you can get aim. Use strong powder, and 1 1-8 oz. No. 6 chilled shot, and if you hold right, they can be killed forty and fifty yards with choke-bored guns.

I do not believe there is any duck that frequents Western waters, that gives the hunter greater satisfaction in shooting than these birds, principally because of their wild, wary natures. It takes strategy to kill them, and after one has become proficient in finding, decoying and shooting them, he feels that his utmost skill will be taxed to make a good day's "bag." Just before flying from land or water, they walk or swim together, and raking shots, doing great execution, may be had. This is also the case when they fly up. They then huddle together, and several may be killed at one discharge of the gun. Should the hunter attempt flight-shooting at "travelers," his gun will be thoroughly tested. He should use nothing smaller than a ten-bore,—that should be heavy, full choked, loaded with 6 dms. powder, 1 oz. No. 2 or 3 shot, and he should hold from 10 to 20 feet ahead of them.

They afford delicious eating, feeding as they do on rich, nutritious and substantial food, and are invariably in excellent condition for the table.

Anas Acuta. The pin-tail duck is twenty-six inches in length, and two feet ten inches in extent; the bill is a dusky lead color: irides, dark hazel; head and half the

neck, pale brown, each side of the neck marked with a band of purple violet, bordering the white; hind part of the upper half of the neck, black, bordered on each side by a strip of white, which spreads over the lower part of the neck before; sides of the breast and upper part of the back, white, thickly and elegantly marked with transverse, undulating lines of black, here and there tinged with pale buff; throat and middle part of the belly, white, tinged with cream; flanks, finely pencilled with waving lines; vent, white; under tail covert black; lesser wing coverts, brown ash; greater, the same tipped with orange, below which is a speculum, or beauty spot of rich, golden green, bordered below with a band of black, and another of white; primaries, dusky brown; tertials, long, black, edged with white, and tinged with rust; rump and tail coverts, pale ash, centered with dark brown; tail, greatly pointed, the two middle tapering feathers being full five inches longer than the others, and black, the rest brown ash, edged with white; legs, a pale lead color. The female has crown of a dark brown color, neck of a dull brownish white, thickly speckled with dark brown; breast and belly, pale brownish white, interspersed with white; back and roof of the neck above, black, each feather elegantly waved with broad lines of brownish white; these wavings become rufous on the scapulars; vent white, spotted with dark brown; tail, dark brown, spotted with white; the two middle tail feathers half an inch longer than the others. The sprig-tail is an elegantly formed, long-bodied duck, the neck longer and more slender than most others. The male weighs 2 lbs.; the female about 1 3–4 lbs.

CHAPTER XXV.

TWO SPORTS; OR, OUT FOR A LARK.

They were not scientific hunters,
Their experience had just begun;
But they were a couple of thoroughbreds,
And out to have some fun.

In treating as fully as I have in other parts of this book of the many little things so necessary to bear in mind, so essential always to remember, to bring success to the hunter, it seems to me that should I allow the opportunity to pass without calling the reader's attention to the other side, and not expose the faults and disclose the imperfections that are so glaring in some inexperienced hunters, that I would be remiss in duty, as well as foregoing a very pleasant task to myself. In doing this, I shall not pick out those who are entirely without knowledge of the handling of guns, or who have never hunted; but rather choose those who have been out at times, are very ordinary shots, possessed of happy-go-lucky dispositions, and are out to have a good time.

We will take two such persons, individuals that one daily meets with. One of them an American, a youth of perhaps twenty-two, whose whole life has been passed in some small city, who has been brought into sharp contact with the struggles of the world, and who feels well satisfied with himself; in fact, is sure that he has forgotten what would afford an excellent education to

men old enough to be his father. He is a recognized authority among his chums on such sports as dog-fights and pugilism, on base-ball, billiards and boating; but claims no great knowledge of the secrets of hunting wild fowl. At the time we write, he is clerking in a grocery store, receiving the magnificent salary of ten dollars a week. He is an adept in his business, as he is at everything he undertakes, and can accomplish with ease the difficult task of wrapping up a dollar's worth of sugar, without spilling a grain, while at the same time, with one eye, he watches the boy trying to get his hand in the apple barrel, and with the other, slyly winks at the giggling school girls as they pass by the open door.

The other is a young man perhaps of twenty, stalwart in appearance, light hair, and honest blue eyes, one you would implicitly trust. He is an apprentice, learning the cigar-makers trade; a German, who has been in this country but a year or two, and who speaks English imperfectly, and who cannot resist the impulse to occasionally throw in German words to help himself out when embarrassed, or in doubt as to what he should say in English. They are fast friends, their stores adjoining.

The duck season is at hand, numerous reports of the great quantity of ducks have often been told them. They resolve to go hunting. The American is called "Jim." This is a very simple abbreviation of his first name. The German, "Hans," in Deutschland, they call him "Johann." The day is set; Jim is to furnish the dog, Hans the eatables, the balance of the outfit they are to rent. At the appointed hour, daylight, Hans waits the coming of his friend. Jim is a trifle late, caused he says by not being able to find his brother's rubber boots, the brother having hidden them in antici-

pation of making such a trip himself. At the fisherman's they pick out their boat. Hans says: "Take vone mit dight row-locks, pound mit ledder." "No," replies Jim, "We want loose oars; that's the kind I always use. Here Sport, come here!" At this call a black dog, half cur, half mastiff, runs briskly forward, and Jim helps him into the boat. Hans stood looking admiringly at the boat, and said: "Shim! dot's a nice poat you bick ouwit."

"Yes," says Jim, "she's a daisy. I'm a little gone on color, and that bright red with white on her sides is just my style."

Hans appeared in great distress about something, and remarking: "Donner und blitzen! I haf der grub forgotten," away he went home after it. Jim was too much disgusted to say much, and muttered to himself something about somebody who couldn't see after four o'clock.

They were now off, gaily they rowed down the stream, Jim in the stern, Hans at the oars. "Gurracious!" exclaimed Hans, "I vonder phwat der madder mit der visherman vas? See how he bumps his arm oop and down. Must pe a pig vire in town." "I'll bet we have forgotten something," said Jim. "Where's my gun?"

Sure enough, the gun had been left on the bank. Each blamed the other, They rowed back, nearly a quarter of a mile, against a strong current. The fisherman handed them the gun with a smile, and joked them because of their forgetfulness. Again they started, headed for the "Docia," seven miles down stream. At the mouth they saw ducks flying in all directions, but none came near them. That red boat wasn't as enticing to them as it was to Jim, and the thumping oars warned all

ducks ahead to look out, and they would keep jumping out in front of the hunters, from 80 to 200 yards. Jim would grab his gun, and say; "Stop rowing, Hans;" but the ducks would always veer just out of reach.

"Mighty funny!" said Jim, "seems to me I never saw them so wild, did you?"

"I told you vot," said Hans," I dink ve made a great mishtake dot ve didn't some degoys along pring; den ve could half segreted oursellufs in der pushes, or grass, and knocked ,m."

"Bah! on your decoys," said Jim with disgust, "don't talk decoys to me, they are a fraud, a nuisance. I had some with me once. They got all tangled together in the boat, and I nearly froze my hands in picking them up."

"Vell, it may be," said Hans, "but I notice the ferry pest dug shooters use them and lods of them. Lets go somevare, for mine pack is almost gebroken mit rowing. Pesides, your hunding tog its using me for a pillow, und if he don't quit it, I will him der poat throw ouwit."

"Well," said Jim, "here we are at Mud Lake. Shove the boat in the grass, tumble our shells all together in that shell box. We want them handy. Its now eleven o'clock, and we will get some good shooting. Wish the grass was a little higher, so as to hide the boat better; but then, they won't notice that. Say Hans, what did you wear that light colored stiff hat for? It makes you look like a dude in a wilderness, and the ducks will surely see you. Your hair is flaxen; take off your hat, then they will take you for a bunch of dried grass, or a dead pond-lily."

"Say Shim," said Hans, "Why did you vare dot plack hat? it makes you look like a durdle in a mut-buddle;

and I dink der dugs half you yourselluf these many dimes seen already. Dake off your hat, your hair is ret, yoost der right color, und dugs vill dake you for a big shesnud, or a punch of veeds growing in der vater."

They both saw the necessity of doing something, or they would get no shooting, and Jim said, "Come, Hans, we must get out of this. Let's leave the boat, go away from it, and hide in the grass, and what we then kill we can get."

So they went, selected a point and waited. Hans took off his hat, bowed politely to Jim, and laid the hat on the ground. Jim, not to be outdone in politeness, returned the compliment. The dog, not to be an unobserved observer, turned around twice, and laid down on both hats, sinking them into the soft mud. Ducks were moving quite freely, and had these hunters had their wits about them, they would have seen ducks in great numbers, pitching into the swamp about a mile from them; but they gave no thought to this, and only expected what chance directed to them. They had fired a good many times, but killed none. They blamed the guns, the ammunition,—everything but themselves; but now, both firing into a large flock, one was winged, tipped and fell about 80 yards off in the grass. The dog saw it, and away he went for it, urged by Jim's voice. He was gone some time; the hunters thought it strange he did not return, and each moment expected him to emerge from the tall grass with the bird. He came, but without the duck. "The bird was winged," said Jim, "he couldn't strike its trail, and couldn't find it." Perhaps not, but his sheepish look and downcast eye showed he had found something. This was corroborated by the few small feathers on his lips, which

Jim didn't notice. Hans did, and said, "Shim! I am dired of sthanding sdill, oxguse me a few minutes, und I vill redurn."

Hans then went where the duck fell, and on his return said: "Yoost as I eggspecded! Der dog has eden der dug, insites, fedders und all!"

"What!" said Jim, "eaten the duck? I can't believe it. Oh, fatal mistake of mine! I brought him away without his breakfast!"

"Dot's all right," said Hans, "But I told you now, und don't you forget it, dot ven I knocks a dug down, I vill go after id mine own selluf, and you bedder vatch dot tog. He is a bad vone. He is a dug-eater from vay pack."

"I am mighty sorry I brought him along," said Jim, "but we will watch him closely. I knew he was a terror on tame chickens. Have seen him kill tame ducks, and complaints have been made of his sucking eggs; but I really thought he would be all right out with us. It's too late now, but let me once catch him *in flagrante delicto*, as the lawyers say, and we will have a circus."

A pair of mallards swung over them. Both fired quickly and simultaneously at the drake, and it fell dead in the water. The dog started for him. Jim excitedly yelled: "Come here! you black whelp." But he didn't come worth a cent, and Jim rushed to the water's edge, grabbing the dog by the tail, and succeeded in keeping him from going after the bird. Hans, with smiling face, said to Jim, "Didn't I knock him?" "What?" replied Jim, "you knock him? Why man, you didn't shoot. I killed him myself, there was but one report, that was from my gun."

"Eh! vat's dot you are giving me?" said Hans, his face red with passion. "Look oud, I am cuvick dempered. You vant to make me ankry? You mean to insinuvate dot I vas a liar? You rascal, you owner of a dug-eating dog; you willian. Come from this mud oud und I vill bound your face into a shelly, so dot your own mudder vont know you, you plasted Americaner."

At this time Jim could hardly hold in. He threw his gun into the mud, sawed the air violently with his arms, his fists clenched, and said:

"You don't have to ask me out to meet you twice. Come on! *Come on!*" And working himself into a frenzy, punched forward, as if hitting an imaginary foe; then he would jump back, as if escaping a return blow.

"What shall it be, three rounds, Marquis of Queensberry? Or to a finish, London Prize Ring?"

"Every feller for himselluf, Gooseperry rules. Hit me vonce! Or do some liddle ding to make me real ankry! and den I vill knock your ret head from your shoulders off."

Jim made a feint with his left, shot out his right straight from the shoulder, hitting Hans a terrible blow on the ear. This thoroughly aroused Hans, and like an enraged bull he lowered his head, darted forward, and by sheer strength, carried Jim to the earth in the soft mud and rushes, landing on top. Holding Jim's hands, and sitting astride of him, he exclaimed: "Ah-ha! vish your friends in the vourd vard could see you now. Take dot!" and suiting the action to the word, he hit Jim in the face.

"Foul! Foul!" yelled Jim, "you have lost the fight, you hit me when I am down."

"Yah! Yah! Call fowl und chicken; call the purreds of der vield and der peasts of der air, you doant get avay from me yoost die samee." And he hit him again and again. Hans felt avenged now, and being cooled off, jumped hastily from his opponent's prostrate body, and said, "Shim! vots de use of you und I fighting? Led's be friends. Honestly! I shod at dot dug."

"So did I," said Jim, "but don't you ever try to bluff me again by talking fight, for you can't do it. I ain't that kind of a fellow. You won the first round on a foul, and we will let it drop till some other time. Tell you what I will do with you, Dutchy; we will draw cuts, the one getting the shortest has credit for killing the duck." Jim held the cuts. Hans pulled the shortest, but Jim slyly nips off the end of the remaining cut with his thumb, and shows up that he won.

"Funny," says Hans, "but ven I traw mit you I alvays lose." "Very funny," replies Jim, arching his eyebrows.

"Here, Sport," said Jim, and turning to Hans, said, "I am going to see if he wont bring that duck." He walked to the edge of the water, threw a clump of dirt out near the duck, and exclaimed; "Go get it, Sport." The dog look inquiringly at Jim, and he patting him kindly on the head said again, "Go get it, Sport, that's a nice boy."

"That ought to fedch him," said Hans; "your tone vas so mild, your woice so sveet, yoost like honey."

"Oh, let up," replied Jim, "Don't guy me, I have got enough to attend to now with this infernal dog." He kept throwing clods, and at last the dog swam past the duck, then completely around it, and finally started

for the shore with it. Jim was delighted. Hans looked nonplussed.

"How's that!" said Jim," ain't that nice, ain't he a dandy?"

"Valk pack," said Hans, "und make him pring it to you ofer landt. Dot vill deach him to redrieve from landt."

Jim did so, but on reaching land the dog immediately commenced to bite, then eat the duck. In an instant Jim was at his side, and had his fingers in his collar. "You will, will you?" said he, and he began kicking him. "You infernal whelp, I'll teach you." With each word he gave him a kick; the dog howled, and tried to get away, but it was useless, he was held tight, and was kicked and pounded until Jim quit from sheer exhaustion, and aided by a parting kick, the dog ran howling away.

Hans enjoyed it, and said: "A vile ago you said if you effer gaught dot tog again, in vragrant delic—doan't remember yoost vat—dot I would a cirgus see. Dink you moost have gaught him dot vay. Mooch opliged for der cirgus."

"I am going to eat," said Jim.

"Ziemlich," replied Hans.

"Open up your basket, Hans, and lets get at it. What have you got, anyway?"

"Here ve are. Dis vas proat und putter; nechts, pologna; nechts, liverwurst; nechst, Schweitzer; und ledst, limpurgur kase."

"Oh, my! how it smells," said Jim.

"Dot ish zo," said Hans, "but it tastes mighty goot. I neffer see limpurgur shees midout I dink of a shoke on my vader. Neffer heard it? No? Vant me to tell it,

eh? Fill your handts mit pologna and sheese up, und I vill broceed. Mine vader you moost rememper is a wery imbortandt man, ezspecially in his own mindt. Vone day he vas hoongry und dry, und tropped himselluf a restaurant in. He seated himselluf at a dable, bicks a baper up, drows his veet upon der dable and says to der vaiter: 'Ich vill skooner peer, grakers und limpurger sheese haben.' Der vaiter prings 'em all. Mine vater smell der sheese und say: 'Here, vaiter! take dot sheese pack, it vas doo young; pring me some dot vas old und strong, dot schmell.' Der vaiter prings more sheese; mine vater geeps his feet on der dable up und reads. Der vaiter he prings olt, strong sheese; my fater schmell it again, und say: 'Dry it again, vaiter, dot vast not strong genough,' Der vaiter then he vas mat und say: 'Sheneral!'—he call him Sheneral, pecause he vas so proudt—'Sheneral! it machts nichts to me, dot you vas a big man, dat you vas treasurer of der Liedertafel und bresident of der Saengerbund soziety, but der rebutation of my poss is at stake, und in vairness to him, you should dake your veet from der dable off, und give der scheese a shance."

Jim had been holding in as long as possible, and at the conclusion of the story rolled over on the ground and fairly yelled with laughter. The point in the story, Hans' quaint manner of telling it, part English, part German, his hesitancy at times for the right word, his sudden adaptation of some German expression to aid him, made it very interesting, and amusing.

So busily engaged are they, that a new-comer approaches them unobserved. The dog gives warning; in looking up they see a farmer boy, aged perhaps fourteen,

his pants in his boots, faded clothes, his hat old, gray and misshapen, over his shoulders an army musket, sadly out of proportion to the youthful hunter. The civil salutations of the day are passed. The boy would move on, but our friends will it otherwise, for, suspended from his back, they count eight mallards. At once they resolve themselves into a committee of two, and are fit subjects for "treason, strategy and spoils." Each hastily runs his hand into his pockets, mentally takes an inventory of his cash on hand, looks askance at the other, silently winks and all is understood. Having during dinner partaken liberally of "Budweiser," they are extremely affectionate and loquacious. "Young man," says Jim, "we are very glad to see you, we are just taking a little lunch, preparatory to starting out, won't you join us, and eat something?"

"Yes, yes, mine lieber freund," joins in Hans, "koom, sitzen sie hier, und etwas zu essen haben."

"For Heaven's sake," exclaims Jim anxiously, "don't talk Dutch to the boy, or you will frighten him away; he don't understand you."

The boy smiled and sat down, began slowly eating, casting quizzical glances at his hosts, as if wondering what next.

"What nice ducks you have, and *so* large, perfect beauties, you must be an excellent shot," said Jim.

"Ill pet you he vas a dandy," chipped in Hans. "You can dell it py the color of his eye. He looks vie Shurman poys, like they look in Shurmany. Half you effer pen in Shurmany, young man? No? Then you half neffer lived; go there, und grow mit the gountry up. Dot's the poss blace. I vish I vas dere now." Then his sweet tenor voice started: "Das ist der

Deutcher's Vaterland," and winking sleepily at Jim, leaned back against a tree.

"Well; I must be going," exclaimed the boy. "Good-bye, gentlemen, much obliged for the dinner." He had got about twenty yards from the hunters before Hans missed him.

"Don't you see? Don't you see, Shim? Dot poy is going off mit our dugs? Schtop him! schtop him!"

"Keep quiet," Jim answers, "I don't intend he shall get away. Give me your money." He calls the boy back To throw off suspicion, he slips Hans' gloves from his pocket, and tells him he forgot his gloves. The boy says they are not his. He then apologizes for calling him back, and says: "What are you going to do with your ducks?" "Take 'em home," replied the boy.

"Don't suppose you would like to part with them?"

"No; don't care to."

"I don't want them," said Jim, "still, thought if you were anxious to get rid of them, my friend not feeling well, we could possibly use them."

"Doan't dink ve vant 'em," interrupts Hans, at the same time looking as if he would like to pound himself for saying it.

"You can have them," the boys says, "If you pay my price."

"All right, ve vill take 'em," Hans exclaims excitedly.

"What?" Jim says in astonishment, looking fiercely at Hans.

"I mean," replied Hans, submissively. "Ve vill dake 'm if ve can acree on brice."

"What do you want for them?" queried Jim.

"Fifty cents a piece," replied the boy.

"Fifty cents! That's outrageous! Awful!"

"Dots a pigger brofit den ve make on segars," Hans puts in.

"Can't help it, that's my price. If you don't want to give it, all right."

"What do you say, Hans, shall we pay it?" asked Jim.

"Guess you pedder, Shim. Maype its casting pread on der vatter, und vill after many days redurn. He seems a nice young man, und I am glat to help him oud."

They pay the boy, take the ducks, and the boy departs.

"Hans," said Jim, "How much money did you bring along?"

"Tri tollars," replies Hans.

"I had five, that makes eight. Do you know what I would have done rather than let that boy get away?"

"Yes, I do," replied Hans, "und it vould half penn all right, und I vould half paid you der eggstry tollar ven ve got home." "Shiminy Gristmus! But I vas scairt ven you let dot poy valk off, I vas zo oxzited dot I vas almost afraid to sbeak. If you hat ledt him off mit dose dugs gegangen, you vould neffer my forgiveness had. Neffer, neffer, *neffer*."

"What did you take me for?" asked Jim, "I didn't intend he should get away. Nice note it would have been, to have gone home without ducks, wouldn't it? Why, man, we never would have heard the last of it. We would have been the laughing stock of the whole town."

"Dots vats der madder," said Hans, "but I vas afraidt dot maype ve hadn't money genough, und ve

couldn't rop der poy on der highway, in der vilderness, mit force und wiolence, against his vill."

"If our money run out, didn't I have a watch?" said Jim.

"Dots vats der madder! But say, Shim, don't you dink it vould a goot idea pe, if ve der same story tell der poys at home?"

"Yes, we mustn't forget that. You say you killed four, I the same, and the odd one we both shot, and can't say who killed it. We have enough, and won't hunt any more to-day.

"Und der tog! vot shall I say apout him? Dat he vas out of bracdice, und a leedle rusdy?"

"Yes, yes," Jim replied. "Don't mention the dog unless compelled to, and then speak tenderly of him, for my mother's sake, she thinks a great deal of him."

They hunted no more that day, but hung around the woods, eating and drinking until early evening, when they started for home, arriving there at about 9 P. M. Next day, they took especial pains to show the game, the evidence of their skill. That afternoon the following appeared in the local paper

"GOOD SHOTS.

"Two of our most successful duck-hunters, Messrs. James Johnson and Johann Dietrich, after months of close confinement to their business, resolved to banish dull care and have a day's outing on the Meredosia Bottoms. They left here yesterday morning at break of day, supplied with the necessary accoutrements for a day of pleasure, taking with them their excellent retriever 'Sport.' They returned last night, pleased

with their day's trip, and ready once again to supply their customers with the necessities of life, or the fragrant Havana. Their kindly remembering the scribe with a toothsome pair of mallards is fully appreciated. It's a sad day for the feathered tribe when these crack shots are among them, for they always return with a goodly supply. We understand there is a fair prospect of a shooting match being arranged between Messers. Johnson and Dietrich, with two gentlemen from a neighboring town. English rules, live birds. Should this match come off, and we hope it will, our citizens will then have an opportunity to see some brilliant work, especially on the part of our home talent."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A MORNING WITH NATURE, AND AN AFTERNOON WITH THE DUCKS

ONE pleasant afternoon in the month of November, 1887, I sat at my office window, admiring the beautiful day, as the sun shone warmly, brightening every object and causing the floating ice to glisten like silver as it piled up on the outjetting points on the Mississippi river. It brought back to me pleasant recollections of a day similar, and at once my thoughts wandered into fairy land,—at least so far away that I picked up my pen and allowed it to drift along by the current of my thoughts until the last hours of the declining day cast the sun's bright gleams on the variegated leaves, so plainly to be seen on the tall trees, fluttering their brown and golden shapes in the slight breeze, as they fell to the ground carpeting the earth with a soft covering, victims of the blighting touch of Jack Frost. I wrote and wrote, wandering in an earthly paradise. Before me nothing was discernible except the grand sight I had once enjoyed, and in my vision that glorious morning was so plainly to be seen that all else was forgotten; and once again I was far from city hum, floating down the river on the broad surface of the Mississippi. Awakening from my pleasant reverie, I saw it was twilight. Hastily putting my manuscript together, I thought an instant, then christened it. "A morning with Nature, and an afternoon with the ducks."

The day is beautiful, the purity of the atmosphere, the stillness of the open water, as it peeps now and then through the floating ice, reminds me of a day, two years ago, when hunting on this same broad stream, I saw a sight that held me spell-bound, and for a time mute with astonishment and admiration.

There was a party of us camped for the night about four miles south of Bellevue. The first night it turned cold, and the morning following the air seemed filled with frost. The slightest sounds were carried to almost phenomenal distances; our voices, unusually clear that morning, seemed to possess increased strength and volume. Conversation in ordinary tones echoed and re-echoed through the woods. When the sun rose the sky was cloudless; his bright rays pierced through the deep and almost impenetrable gloom; the frost disappeared and rose in clouds of vapor, on every side, the trees were laden with the most beautiful frost I ever saw. Our first view was taken when in the middle of the river, as we were slowly and gently sculling across.

All at once as if some huge curtain was raised, the sun glared over the tops of the adjacent hills and the frost-laden trees were exposed to our view, as if by magic. We were west of an island, and had a distinct view of the lights and shadows caused by the sun shining through the trees. In the darkest shadows the frost, dull and lifeless, had the appearance of hammered silver; then as the light grew stronger, the frost turned to a brighter silver, and when the full rays were turned on, it sparkled and scintillated in the morning light. No diamond ever showed more variable and brilliant hues than did the frost that morning, as it quivered

and sparkled under the warm rays of the rising sun. It seemed at times as if imbued with life, and as it clung tenaciously to the overburdened trees it seemed to breathe with a sigh, and when at last it could no longer hold to the branches, a gentle rustling and the quivering mass fell toward the earth, carrying bunches with it from the lower branches, while myriads of shooting stars sparkled for an instant in the sunlight, and then, as if with one last expiring gasp, a cloud of snow-white dust arose in the air, and instantly disappeared.

'T was Nature's painting, 't was Nature's scene,
We were enchanted, indeed in paradise lost,
As we saw the wood in silver and green,
All covered with snow-white, clinging frost.

It seemed as if we were in fairy-land,
That earthly thoughts and things dissolved in air;
We saw bright jewels sparkling in the morning sun,
Emeralds, rubies, diamonds, jewels beyond compare

And, Oh ! how beautifully it glistened
On trees, on leaves and waving grass;
In silent admiration we looked, then listened,
As it quivered and fell in a trembling mass.

I have hunted, I might say, all my life, at least since a boy of twelve; have seen Nature dressed in all her various garbs, both joyous and mournful, in her warm springtime, in the summer of her life, and in the mature fall, as well as in the golden age of winter, but this was one of the grandest sights I ever witnessed.

Later in the day, while lying at full length in the bottom of the boat, half buried in hay, eating a generous lunch, I saw, far off in the west, ducks high in the air, travelling south, as I supposed. Suddenly, they hesitated, and, making a wide swoop, dropped almost perpendicularly behind a cluster of trees. Soon another

flock did the same, then another, and still another. That settled it. I knew they were dropping in on their feeding ground. I marked the place, although fully a mile from us; crossed the river, and, throwing the decoys over our backs, we started for the ducks. It was a mystery to my companion how we were to find them, since nothing was to be seen, except a dense forest of trees; but I had marked they were lighting directly west of two large oak trees, how far of course I could not guess. Going directly to these trees, we started due west, and soon heard the anticipated quack. Continuously moving forward, we caught a glimpse of the pond, where they were enjoying their midday picnic.

Such a sight! The pond covered about four acres, and to this time, the ducks were in complete possession and control of it. They were scattered in bunches, ranging in numbers from three to fifty, all mallards. Some with heads hidden underneath their wings were floating serenely, and dreaming idly of what ducks usually dream; others were preening themselves, now rising on their feet and fluttering their wings, while great drops of water were shaken from their shining bodies; still others were swimming to and fro, advancing and receding as if to form a better acquaintance with their neighbors. On the banks some sat idly, half asleep, basking in the warm sun, while near them their companions were tipping up in the shallow water, performing acrobatic feats. First their glossy green heads with their plump bodies would be on the surface, then presto! their heads would disappear and their white and purple tails would point upward, while their bills were hidden under water and mud, searching for the ever welcome acorn.

Where they all came from it was impossible to tell. The air was full of them ; they came singly, in pairs, and in flocks ; the very heavens seemed to be casting out ducks. There was no hesitation on the arrival of the new-comers ; this seemed to be the place they long had sought. There was no timid circling to see if danger lurked in the overhanging willows, and with the utmost abandon they came down gracefully, lighting upon the placid water. They came from every direction, there appearing to be one constant deluge of living feathers. A shining of green, white, slate, and purple feathers. I close my eyes and see the sight even now. In my imagination I see some old drake coming down with bowed wings: down, down he comes until it seems as if every bone in his body would be smashed by the concussion with the water, such is the speed with which he is descending; when, perhaps thirty feet from the water, he reverses his position, his head is elevated, his neck is thrown into a graceful curve, his breast swells out, his yellow feet extend before him, his wings flutter swiftly, and, instead of meeting his doom, he gracefully drops with a gentle splash among his waiting companions, who greet him with loud quackings of welcome, which he acknowledges by a gentle, grating chuckle, and a graceful nodding of his shining head.

How quietly we laid behind the fallen log, and how we enjoyed the weird, wild scene, to watch, unbeknown to them, the ducks in their quiet midday retreat. It seemed almost sacreligious to wantonly intrude on their privacy, and ruthlessly drive them away from this quiet place by loud reports and death-dealing guns. But we were too practical to allow the romance of the situation to influence our object in coming, and simultaneously

rising, we fired together at the frightened birds. The overhanging willows and the sloping bank hid from our view many that were near to us, and our first barrels were hurriedly fired at those that jumped from the centre of the pond. The loud roar of the guns threw all, both wakeful and sleeping ducks, into the greatest consternation, and they displayed remarkable activity and skill in trying to get away from the pond. As they rose from their bed of indolence, the flapping of their strong wings emitted sounds similar to a rushing train of cars. My companion hastened to secure the fallen birds, and shoot the escaping cripples, while I hurried to place our wooden decoys in the water. Much to our surprise we had killed but five. The decoys out, we were soon secreted behind our temporary and hastily constructed blind.

Had we openly walked up to the pond, and driven them out without shooting, no doubt more of them would have returned, but we were hurrying down the river, and time was literally flying, and we felt the necessity of quickly improving any chances we had. The ducks soon commenced to return, and with bowed wings or timid circling they would come within reach of our choke-bores. Wary at first, their suspicions were soon lulled into a feeling of confidence when they heard our welcome call, as we imitated their well-known cries. It was a delightful place to shoot, the bright western sky bringing out their shining bodies in grand relief, as they flew over the decoys, high in the air ; then flying off as if intending to depart and never return, but quickly turning when our tremulous beseeching cry would reach the ear of the drake leading the flock. It was too enticing for him, and seeing our decoys wait-

ing so patiently, sitting so serenely, entirely oblivious of all sense of danger, he would swerve and turn toward the decoys, and the flock would follow their leader and come toward us. The quick report of the guns, the climbing ducks going straight up in the air on the explosion of the powder, the centre shot, doubling the drake up limp and lifeless, the hasty ill-judged one, tipping the wing of the duck and necessitating a long chase, were all seen and heard in a very short space of time. All kinds of shots were presented and accepted, of course not always successfully, but we tried them all. A duck would come in, forgetful of everything, and with a grand swoop bow her wings right over the decoys thirty yards from us. A flash, a dull roar, a cloud of smoke, the woods filled with the re-echoing sounds, a drift of feathers floating in the air, and the duck throwing her head back on her falling body, would fall with a dull splash in the water. Then a drake off at our sides high over the water would come toward us, his green head looming up clearly against the light back-ground of steam colored sky. He looks down carelessly at our decoys, at his floating brothers and sisters; we know he will not come back, and with implicit confidence throw our guns up. Quick as lightning, there flashes through our brains height, distance, velocity, both of shot and speed of birds,—the gun points at his body, then slowly and steadily advances ahead of him, one-two-three-four feet the brain conveys the thought to the fingers, the fingers instantly respond, and at the report, the drake "shuts up" its plump body like a jack-knife and a dark object falls like a ball of lead to the earth. So small does he look as he comes from his fifty, perhaps sixty yards of height, that his body in its descent doesn't look larger than a pigeon.

Then again, an incomer, first deciding to light among the decoys, then quickly changing her mind comes right over us. *This* is the only time we shoot and kill, seeing nothing at time of pulling the trigger. The duck advances; we aim at her; she is coming directly over us; we draw on her breast, then her head; the gun keeps moving, then her bill is passed, and she is entirely out of our sight. We know she is still coming, and moving the gun a trifle further ahead, fire, and she falls at our feet.

Suddenly one passes over our heads unawares, we accidentally catch sight of it, when quickly it is high over us, going away very fast. Hastily catching aim, we fire fully two feet under it. The smoke bothers us; we cannot see whether or not we hit,—the drake is not flying away. We mark the direction; see the golden leaves fall in a tremulous manner to the ground, then see falling, bounding with gentle concussion from limb to limb, a bunch of brown chestnut, canvas, green, purple and white, and we mark the spot where the dead drake lies.

The flight of the birds had almost entirely stopped. We sat in our blinds gazing listlessly at the fleeting clouds, discussing the beauties of the morning, and admiring the variegated scenery on all sides of us.

Now the flight begins again, the ducks begin coming back in great numbers. My companion was an inexperienced hunter, and when I would make a double, his admiration knew no bounds, and his compliments were extravagant to a degree. He wasn't excitable. Oh, no! most beginners are not. Next to his seeing me kill them, there was nothing he enjoyed more than shooting cripples. When a duck struck the water and showed the least inclination to prolong his life, bang! would go

the gun, and the duck would spread out its wings on the water, gasping for breath, while the gurgling in its throat would show it recognized the uncertainty of life and the absolute certainty of death; its teetering, drooping head would fall forward, and it would be motionless in death. Then again, when one would cunningly sneak off, with its bill just out of water, looking like a floating stick, how he did like to bury that bill with a charge of 6's from his choke-bore. One fell winged, not over twenty feet from us. Alas! it moved. Away went that gun again before I could stop him, and the head and upper portion of the neck were cut off slick and clean. I demurred to this proceeding; but he constituted himself judge, said the question wouldn't admit of argument, overruled my demurrer, and as at that time he considered himself a court of last resort, I didn't even take any exceptions, but let the matter drop. He said that no duck should strike the water alive and get away from him. A few moments after this I shot another; down it came, winged; fell right in front of him. He was ready for it, and I expected to see it lifted clear out of the water. It was laughable to see him stand there watching for it, his gun pointed where the duck disappeared. "Give it to her!" I said. "Well!" said he, "that beats me, where in the world do you suppose that duck has gone to?" "You ought to know," said I; "you were just telling me that no duck should strike the water alive and get away. It's all I can do to knock them down, without being compelled to watch them. See here, I will help you out this time," and walking out carefully into the water, so as not to roil it, I showed him the duck, dead on the bottom, clinging to a bunch of grass which it had seized when it struck the water and drowned itself.

"Did you see it before you went out?" said he.

"Not at all. I saw where the bird fell: it was crippled and when it did not come up at once, I knew it had grabbed hold of something and drowned itself. Don't know as the duck is to blame, as its death was easier that way than to be riddled with that murderous gun of yours. There is nothing unusual about their meeting death in this way, I have known them to do so time and again."

Just then a drake came along over us, high up, and holding fully three feet ahead of him, I had the satisfaction of seeing him come down dead. The shot was fired right over my companion's head; he evidently heard it, for he jumped up excitedly and said, "What in blazes are you doing, trying to blow the top of my head off?"

"Not at all," said I. "The duck was killed, and taking into consideration that fact, I didn't think you were in any great danger."

"It strikes me," said he, "that you are too careless. Some day you will shoot somebody. I never have hunted much just on that account; afraid some careless fellow like yourself would shoot me."

"If you live until I shoot you, you will live a great many years," said I; "and if it is all the same to you, don't swing your gun this way quite so often."

"You needn't be afraid of me, I am too old a man to be fooling with a gun, and have it go off acci——"

He didn't finish what he started out to, simply because his gun *did* go off accidentally. Such a sheepish look as he gave me.

"Gosh!" said he, "I don't see how that happened."

"Don't you?" said I; "then I will tell you. For the

last half hour you have been fooling with the hammers, raising and lowering them. Your fingers are cold, and the hammers slipped away from you; that's how it happened. Now, cock your gun, and leave it that way. Keep your finger off the trigger, your thumb from the hammers, and it won't occur again."

He solemnly promised it should not happen again, but it's an actual fact that his gun did go off again in that same manner later in the day. He was nervous and excitable, and in constant fear lest some accident *might* happen with a cocked gun, so he kept the hammers down; then when a duck came near or threatened to approach us, he raised the hammers in anticipation of a shot. If the duck swerved off, then the hammers were lowered; and this constant raising and lowering, seconded with cold fingers and a nervous apprehension that something *might* happen, was the cause of the unexpected firing. Feeling that a change of air and a little exercise might smooth his ruffled feelings, his attention was called to a flock of mallards alighting in a slough about a hundred yards from us. They were coaxing flying ducks from our decoys, and at my suggestion my companion went over to rout them out. He was not gone long; it didn't seem to me over ten minutes, but on his return he was pleasantly surprised to find lying on the water nine mallards which I had killed while he was gone. They afforded me some of the prettiest shooting I ever enjoyed. They came in, in pairs, as fast as I could load and shoot,—and the last bird shot at was the one missed, the first four pairs having been killed in succession. Picking up the ducks he carried them out on the dry bank, and tied them together. Much to his astonishment, he found we had

thirty-eight mallards. They were soon suplemented by an additional six, that were killed while he was tying those already killed. It was now about four o'clock, and having to make fully fifteen miles down stream to camp, we hastily gathered together ducks and decoys, and double tripping, soon had things in our boat, and started on our journey. We both regretted the necessity of leaving this spot so early in the day, for it was most truly a bonanza, and could we have remained till dark, we could easily have bagged from seventy-five to one hundred.

After being settled cozily in the soft hay in the boat, my companion, while stroking the bright colors and admiring the immense size of our dead drakes, exclaimed to me that we were in great luck in finding these birds.

"Why! my dear friend," said I, "there wasn't the least element of luck about it, the finding of those birds was merely bringing into use my practical knowledge of woodcraft, birdcraft or by whatever name you choose to call it. You were industriously engaged in seeing how fast you could dispose of sandwiches, pickles, etc., and your mind was so fully occupied with your pleasant duties that you thought of nothing else, except to occasionally crack some pleasant joke, and proffer me the kernel of it. While you were doing this, my ears and eyes were open, as well as my mouth,—ears listening to your bright stories,—eyes constantly scanning the horizon, to see where ducks were going, and what they were intending to do. Had I allowed lunch and stories to engross my attention as you did, we would have missed this splendid shooting we both enjoyed so much. Then always bear in mind when hunting ducks,

let your eyes follow a flying flock until they pass entirely out of sight, and you will be surprised how often you will see them pitching into some spot not far from you. Should you see several flocks dart down to the same place, take your decoys and go there; you will find it their feeding place, or some quiet mid-day retreat where they will be found in large numbers.

We were now at the head of an island. Said I, "We will get three ducks along the overhanging willows of this island."

He looked at me in astonishment, and said, "How do you know we will? If you are so certain, guess you had better shoot them yourself." Saying this, he opened the lunch basket, half reclined on the hay, and proceeded to punish his already over-burdened stomach with more lunch. I sculled gently and quietly along the bushy shore; first jumped and killed a blue-bill, then a mallard drake. We had now reached the foot of the island, and I was about to despair in getting the third duck, when a mallard sprung out of the grass not over 35 yards from me, and fell dead at the report of my gun. My companion was utterly dumbfounded and exclaimed, "That beats me! How do you—how could you tell just how many ducks you would kill coming down this island? It is beyond my understanding. You seem to know all about these ducks, read them in the air, tell how many there are on an island, and just how many you will kill in passing; you are too deep for me. See here! I am going to test your knowledge of ducks." And, grabbing one from the pile, handed it to me, saying, "Look at it! Tell me how old it is, and what's its name?"

Without cracking a smile, I opened its mouth, looked at it intently, and handing it back to him said:

"It was born a year ago last May."

"And its name?" gasped he.

"Anas boschas — or, mallard duck. They have no christian name. You seem to doubt my knowledge of ducks," said I, "now I am going to demonstrate to you, what a gifted duck-shooter can do. When I say 'gifted' I mean just what I say. I mean when a human being is blessed with the power of scenting or smelling live ducks—"

"Do you mean to say that you can do this?" said he, as he looked at me with disgust depicted on his bright face.

"Most certainly!" said I.

He gave me a look of pity and sorrow, exclaiming, "Did you ever hear the fate of Sapphira?"

"Yes," said I, "but don't pass judgment on me without trial. It is indescribable just how I can catch and retain scent; possibly, it's owing to the peculiar construction and formation of my nasal appendage; you will notice the conformation of it,—the enlarged nostrils; the hook at the end;—perhaps these aid me to accept and retain the scent, after once it is discovered. What it smells like is equally impossible to relate. It seems like a combination of odors; of aromatic herbs, of dew-covered plants, of night-blooming cereus, musk and a fresh water smell, all mixed together. But only be patient, and when we get near game you can test this power yourself; *may be* you can experience it."

He was too much overcome to reply, but his looks were indicative of his thoughts. We were now near a tow-head; a small island in the centre of the river. Not a bird was to be seen; neither did I expect it on the side we were on. The island was narrow and could

easily be shot across. Quickly raising my head, I sniffed the air, as if I had struck a doubtful or uncertain scent, then snuffing over again, punched him with my foot, told him to keep low and be prepared to shoot, at the same time suggesting that he try and see if he could not smell them. Such a look as he gave me! We came down quietly, and all the time I was exclaiming to him in a whisper, that the scent was growing stronger. At last I told him the scent was so strong that they would jump out any second. He was only half prepared. At my command (I had to be imperative at this time) he was ready. Giving a few quick, strong strokes with my sculling oar, I drove the boat into the sand on the inclined shore, making a grating noise; when up jumped, within 30 feet of us, fully fifteen mallards. I dropped one with each barrel, while he killed with his first and missed with the second. He was too much surprised to move, and I clambered over him and picked up the ducks. When I returned he hadn't recovered from his astonishment.

Said I, "It was very plain there was quite a large flock from the strong scent, and had the wind blown directly toward us, I could have winded them much sooner."

He said nothing then, indeed was in deep thought for an hour, while I talked along as if nothing unusual had happened. That night, as we were rowing along, he suddenly dropped his oars, allowed the boat to drift with the current, and looking me squarely in the face, said, "Now, no nonsense; tell me, how you knew those ducks were on that point."

"Smelled them," said I.

"Oh, come! you know I don't believe that and

won't; but let me know, did you see them light there?"

"No, I didn't," said I. "This is how I knew it; yet, I didn't know it; but I felt they *ought* to be there. That island is perfectly familiar to me, and a great place for ducks to sit in midday picking up gravel, or sitting in the sun. To-day it is clear, but cold; a slight wind blowing from the northwest; naturally they would get out of the wind and sit in the sun. For an hour before we got there, that island was constantly in my sight. Not a hunter passed there, nothing to disturb them, and I felt morally sure they would be there. My jumping and killing the precise number at the other island, prompted me to test fate a trifle further; so without malice aforethought, the scenting or smelling of game was sprung on you. Had the birds not been found, my surprise would of course have been very complete, and I am *afraid* I should have claimed the scent was lost by the ducks swimming off in the water."

The morning following this hunt we distributed 50 mallards among our friends. Had we hunted in a haphazard manner, regardless of method, without calling into service lessons that years of experience had taught one of us, we would not have killed one-tenth of the number we did.

There are lessons to be learned in this article, which should be committed to memory by every hunter. The day so exceedingly beautiful, the frost so transparent, the trees so gorgeous in their silvered coverings, the sky, the water, the earth,—all Nature in her brightest garbs, caused one to involuntarily recognize the existence of the ever-living God. Then, when you hunt, don't be selfish, and hunt merely for the game to be had;

but cast aside all cares and business thoughts, wander over the prairies, through vales and valleys, in shadowy glens, on craggy hill-sides; or, rowing on some quiet lake, or floating idly with the current of some broad or sinuous stream, inhale draught after draught of delightfully pure air, and be thankful for the chance of doing so. Better enjoy the day this way, and bag a dozen birds, than kill a hundred, with your mind at all times filled with selfish, avaricious motives.

Let the young hunter read again my description of the shooting an "incomer," the "overhead shot," where the duck was not seen until after it had passed; the "long, high shot," far off at the side; ponder them well, it will be a profitable use of time, and rich interest added to the knowledge he may have, for they are the three most difficult shots to make at wild fowl.

The pleasant incident of jumping the three ducks along the island; the laughable "scenting scene,"—these are referred to, because they illustrate things that should be remembered. They teach this *lesson*:—always approach a place where there is a possibility of finding game, with caution; never pass a place where there is a likelihood of finding birds, without investigating the ground thoroughly; never allow a flock of ducks to fly out of your sight, without watching them until they are lost to view.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE.

(*Anser Albifrons:* called "Brant" in the West.)

HEAD and neck, grayish brown; at the base of the upper mandible a white band. Adult with bill carmine-red; with the ungins white; head and neck grayish brown; a white band margined behind with blackish brown on the anterior part of the forehead, along the bill: general color of the back, deep-gray, the feathers of its fore part, broadly tipped with grayish brown, the rest with grayish white. Hind part of back, deep-gray; wings grayish brown, toward the edge ash-gray, as are the primary coverts, and outer webs of the primaries; rest of the primaries and secondaries grayish black,—the latter, with a narrow edge of grayish white, the former, edged and tipped with white. Breast, abdomen, lower tail coverts, sides, rump and upper tail coverts, white; the breast and sides, patched with brownish-black, on the latter intermixed with grayish-brown feathers. Tail, rounded; feet, orange; claws, white. Length, twenty-seven and one half inches; wing fourteen and one half inches.

The white-fronted geese, at a not remote period were very plenty throughout the West. Their numbers have steadily decreased, going regularly and surely before

advancing civilization. In former days, they were often found, though not associating with, yet in the same open waters, lakes and ponds where ducks resorted for food. They are exceedingly shy and hard to decoy, usually flying high over land, and pitching down almost vertically, when inclined to alight in some feeding ground, or unexposed water. They are entirely lacking in inquisitiveness, and therefore decoy poorly. The mere fact that what appears to be a large number of their kind, resting quietly in great security, in some quiet retreat, makes but little difference to their knowing minds. They rely on their individual senses, and, if things appear all right to them, singly and collectively, well and good; if not, the matter is at once settled, and shying off, they utter their familiar "Ah-le," "Ah-le," and avoid places the least suspicious.

Because of the uncertainty of decoying them decoys of their own kind will not pay for the making. Canada Geese decoys answer the purpose, placed in stubble fields as directed in article on "Wild Goose Shooting," but the hunter will find them wary and hard to get, under all circumstances. The best way and the most successful is when one is shooting mallards on the edge of a vast field of wild rice, or hidden in one's boat in the same kind of blind. Keep a sharp look-out for them at all times, and early in the morning, in the dim gray light; or, at even-time, when the day is dying, their big phantom forms will loom up boldly against the sky, and they can easily be killed. Of course, these are only chance opportunities; but bear in mind, that is the way to get them, by chance, for they cannot be found in sufficient numbers to afford amusement to the hunter who is out for success, as well as for recreation. Nos.

4 and 5 are best sizes, where they can be fired at at close range. At long distance, 50 to 70 yards, 1 oz., No. 2, 5 1–2 or 6 dms. powder in a 10 gauge gun will make a load that will please one for effectiveness. At the same time, the recoil will be reduced, by reason of the small amount of shot, and dressed as the duck hunter should be, the recoil will not be at all unpleasant.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE SNOW GOOSE.

(*Anser Hyberoreous.*)

LENGTH, 32 inches; extent, 60 inches; bill, 3 inches, purplish carmine color, very thick at the base, rising high in the forehead, small and compressed at the extremity, terminating in a whitish, rounding nail; the edges of the two mandibles separate their whole length in a singular manner; the gibbosity occupied by dental rows resembling teeth; which, with the parts adjoining, are of blackish color.

Plumage, snowy white, except the forepart of the head all round as far as the eyes, which is yellowish rust color, mixed with white, and except the nine exterior quill feathers, which are black, shafted with white, and white at the roots. The coverts of these and of the bastard wing sometimes pale ash color.

Legs and feet, purplish carmine; iris, dark hazel; tail rounded, of sixteen feathers; the tongue is horny at the extremity, and armed on each side with thirteen long, sharp, bony teeth, placed like those of a saw, with their points inclined backward.

The Snow Goose, while almost a total stranger to many hunters in Eastern, Middle and some Western States,

notably in Nebraska and Dakota, are found in plenty, mingling in profusion, and associating with Brant, Canada Geese and Hutchin's Geese, with fraternal affection. Their habits are quite similar to the habits of other wild geese; the food, the same; and they may often be seen on sand bars, in the low sluggish rivers, in the open lakes of Dakota and Nebraska, forming conspicuous objects, as they show up so clearly in the bright sunlight, their snowy white pencilled off by the glossy black on their wings, making a pretty sight when brought into contrast with dull bars, drifting sand, barren pastures, or the dark, upturned broken prairie. When the Canadas leave the rivers and lakes and fly heavily over fields and prairies, going to and returning from their feeding grounds, the pure white ones, similar to tame geese, will rise and go with them, sometimes lead the horde of departing geese, and rising to considerable height, much higher than their cousins, will fill the air with shrieking, discordant sounds, carrying to the ears of the onlooker most dismal and wretched cries. When in air, they are continual gossips, and could an interpretation be made of the language used, judging its purport by the tone it is uttered, they must be guilty of the most deliberate and malicious slander, probably against their slow-moving neighbors,—the Canadas, possibly, against the human-race,—at any rate, one feels justified in classing them as common scolds. They will not decoy well, and when they come within 60 or 75 yards of the hunter who is concealed in his "pit," he should let drive at them, trusting the result to cool aim and a close-shooting, hard-hitting gun.

When sitting in stubble field or open prairie, they

closely resemble a ridge or drift of snow, at a distance, and are very noticeable. At such a time it is useless to attempt to approach them, for they will be so situated that the hunter cannot do so without being observed. They are fair eating, not especially to be longed for and yet not to be despised. The same charges should be fired at them as at other geese. When a flock is seen, if there are two or more in the party, let all but one make a wide circuit, and secrete themselves in the grass or cornfield, so they will have to fly against the wind, then let one frighten them up—they will rise and fly directly against the wind, and the hidden hunters will often get near and easy shots.

In alighting, they do not sail like the Canadas, but pitch down in an irregular flight, apparently each one for himself.

CHAPTER XXIX.

BRANT; OR, BRENT GOOSE.

(*Anser Bernicla.*)

BILL, black; head and neck all round black; a patch on the sides of the neck white; upper parts brownish gray, the feathers margined with light grayish brown; quills and primary coverts grayish black; fore part of breast light brownish gray, the feathers terminally margined with grayish white; the abdomen and lower tail coverts white; sides, gray, the feathers rather broadly tipped with white. Length, two feet; wings, 14 1-2 inches. Female rather smaller.

I have no doubt, when many experienced wild fowl hunters read the title to this article, then read the description given, they will instantly say,—at least think, that my description is that of the Hutchin's Goose, and that the sketch of the "white-fronted goose" should be that of the Brant. A frank confession on my part compels me to agree with them, for no Western wild fowl shooter would call this scientific description of Brant or Brent goose to be an accurate representation of the Brant, as it is universally recognized in the West, among practical hunters. While on the contrary, the description of the white-fronted goose one recognizes at a glance as that of the well-known Brant.

After a careful and exhaustive examination of the

ornithological books at hand, I fail to find a description of the Hutchin's goose, and the only thing near it is that of the Brant goose, which corresponds exactly with the Hutchin's goose, as recognized in Nebraska and Dakota.

The nomenclature of the Goose family will put in doubt and mystify the wild fowl hunter greatly, for they receive their names in the West, not scientifically and historically, but locally. And when we find them classified under one name in a given locality, in another, perhaps not remote, names will be thrust upon them entirely dissimilar. As an illustration, I have known "Canada geese" called "Canadas," "Hutchin's," "Hudson Bay geese," and some local hunters would evade all these and give them the appropriate, but not dignified name of "Old Honkers"; and they would be persistent in their claims of right, and could not be convinced to the contrary. What is known as the "Hutchin's goose" in Nebraska is precisely like the Canada in appearance, except in size, the Hutchin's goose weighing from 7 to 9 pounds, while the Canadas run from 10 to 18 pounds, averaging 11 to 12 pounds. They should be hunted in the same manner. The chapter on Canada goose shooting fully explains the most approved methods.

CHAPTER XXX.

TRUMPETER SWAN.

(*Cygnus Buccinator.*)

Adult Male.—Bill, longer than the head, higher than broad at the base, depressed and a little widened at the end, rounded at the tip. Upper mandible with the dorsal fin sloping; the ridge very broad at the base, with a large depression, narrowed between the nostril, curved toward the end; the sides nearly erect at the base, gradually becoming more horizontal and convex toward the end.

Head of moderate size, oblong, compressed; neck extremely long and slender; body very large, compact, depressed; feet, short, stout, placed a little behind the centre of the body; legs bare an inch and a half above the joint; tarsus short, a little compressed covered all round with angular scales of which the posterior are very small. Hind toe extremely small, with a narrow membrane.

A portion of the forehead about half an inch in length, and the space intervening between the bill and the eye are bare. Plumage dense, soft and elastic; on the head and neck the feathers oblong, acumate; on the other parts in general broadly ovate and rounded, on the back short and compact; wings, long and broad; the anterior protuberance of the first phalangeal bone very prominent; primaries curved, stiff, tapering to an obtuse point, the second longest exceeding the first by

half an inch, and the third by a quarter of an inch; secondaries, very broad and rounded, some of the inner rather pointed. Tail, very short, graduated, of twenty-four stiffish, moderately broad, pointed feathers, of which the middle exceeds the lateral by 2 1-4 inches.

Bill and feet, black; the outer edges of the lower mandible and the inside of the mouth yellowish flesh color. The plumage is pure white, excepting the upper part of the head, which varies from brownish red to white, apparently without reference to age or sex; length to end of tail 68 inches; bill along the ridge 4 7-12ths inches; from the eye to the tip 6.

In the winter, the young has the bill black, with the middle portion of the ridge to the length of 8 1-2 light flesh color, and a large elongated patch of light, dim purple on each side; the edge of the lower mandible and the tongue dull, yellowish flesh color. The eyes dark brown. The feet dull yellowish brown tinged with olive; the claws brownish black; the webs blackish brown. The upper part of the head and cheeks are light reddish brown, each feather having toward its extremity a small oblong whitish spot, narrowly margined with dusky; the throat nearly white, as well as the edge of the lower eyelid. The general color of the other parts is grayish white, slightly tinged with yellow; the upper part of the neck marked with spots similar to those on the head. Length to end of tail 52 1-2 inches; extent of wings, 91; weight, 19 lbs. 8 oz. The bird is very poor.

In the Western States this noble bird is almost extinct;

they have been comparatively strangers, except at rare intervals. Not far in the distant past, they were annually seen with us on the large lakes and rivers, and frequently feeding in immense bayous. Of all the birds that swim the waters with shapely forms, gracefulness of proportion, elegance of contour, the swan exceeds them all, as it floats on the bosom of some broad lake, or wide and deeply flowing river. It is larger than other wild fowl, and the rare grace of its movements, the litheness of its arched neck, its jet black bill, with the deep yellow streak running in a diminutive line from the eye, the spotless white, seeming purer and whiter than the drifted snow, attracts our admiration at once. They are the synonym of beauty and grace, and our imagination, however vivid it may be, can picture nothing more graceful, and quietly beautiful, than one of these birds on the water, in its uniform of frosted white. When we see a whiteness that is absolutely colorless, resting inanimately, it attracts our attention, for we see in it, what the world recognizes as an emblem of perfect purity. But when we see the swan, an animated being, moving quietly and gracefully with arched neck, sailing so queenly and majestically through the rippling water, gently propelling itself forward with its great wide black feet, the sunshine making conspicuous the glossy white, and faint shadows seeming to flit and follow each other, we gaze in pleasing wonder on the trail of incandescence left in their wake.

For ages past their beauty, grace and elegance has been recognized. When in ancient times nobility sought to build vessels whose cost was disregarded, whose beauty of design was to reach perfection itself, the uppermost thoughts in the mind of the builders were,

to make the vessel sit upon the water with the natural grace of the swan. To make it still more realistic, the archness of the neck, the beautifully shaped head, were placed at the prow, while the gondola itself followed in shape the body of the bird, while fluted and corrugated wings extended symmetrically toward the stern of the boat. It was in such a barge as this that Cleopatra first went forth, and met and conquered Antony,—not by force and arms, but with fascinating glances, oriental loveliness, and Egyptian splendor.

I have not seen a swan for years until this spring, when my companion and myself had the good fortune of securing two. They were evidently travellers bound for the distant North, and stopped among us temporarily for food and rest. There were fifteen in the flock. The two we got had separated from the rest, and we shot them in the middle of the Mississippi river, amongst floating ice, having first trimmed our low scull-boat to represent a drifting cake of ice. They were both old birds, one weighing 19 lbs., and the other a few pounds heavier. The heaviest and largest one I have had mounted,—the other being skinned, rewarded us with the nicest down I ever saw, being fully two inches in length, and of the purest white. There are no particular instructions to be given as to the manner of shooting them,—they are too rarely found. Getting them is ascribed wholly to luck, the duck-hunter coming upon them unexpectedly while in pursuit of wild fowl.

When the hunter has the rare good fortune to kill one, it is a bright spot in his experience, and an event which he always remembers with pleasure.

Their habits are similar to geese. They are exceedingly wary, always rise up-wind, and should be ap-

proached from the windward. Should the wind blow hard, the hunter will be pretty sure to get a shot. A thick coating protects their bodies, and consequently they are hard to kill. When flying, their long neck seems out of proportion, and although a large bird, their flight is exceedingly swift. Their cry is a mixture, sounding like half crane, half goose. Some authorities consider them good eating. Don't try it, unless you are inquisitive, or desirous of experimenting.

CHAPTER XXXI.

CANADA GOOSE SHOOTING.

(*Anser Canadensis.*)

Sailing in the solemn midnight, underneath the frosty moon,
I can hear the clanging pinions of each shadowy platoon,
Near the winged hosts, commotion, marching to the Northern Ocean,
File on file, rank on rank, speeding to some reedy bank,
Oozy fens or marshes gray, far up Baffin's icy bay;
Honking, clamoring in their flight under the black clouds of night.

Winging over wastes of ocean, over voyaging ships they pass,
Where from reeling mast the shipboy notes them with the up-rais'd glass,
And the fisher in his dory drops his line to view their flight,
And the baffled fowler gazes, hopeless, till they fade from sight;
Inland over plain and pasture, over mountain, wood and stream,
Onward speeds the long procession, northward the swift pinions gleam.

Through the rough, dark months of winter, in what sunny clime,
'Mid green lagoons and savannahs, passed ye the delicious time ?
Haply amid verdurous islands where the Mexic billows smile,
'Mid sweet flower-glades and gay plumage ye would riot all the while;
Haply amid red flamingoes, hovering o'er some lilied lake,
Where the aloe drops its branches and the palms their branches shake.

ISAAC MCLELLAN.

THE wild goose is so familiar to nearly every citizen of the United States, that it seems quite superfluous to call public attention to it scientifically and historically, except in a casual manner. Those great ornithologists Audubon and Wilson, besides others have treated of it so exhaustively, that, combined with the practical observation the reader may have had, it may possibly be "love's labor lost" with many, for me to describe its habits, resorts, peculiarities and breeding places.

Their ancestry, their origin, when and where first discovered, dates back, one might say, "to a time when the memory of man runneth not to the contrary." There is no time in the history of the world that we can trace back, and find them unknown. In England they were seen and known hundreds of years ago. Acclimated and domesticated in Ancient Rome, they served as sentinels to warn the sleeping inhabitants of that city of the enemy's approach, which event occurred soon after the Eternal City had been furrowed out by Romulus and Remus; and to go still further back, to pre-historic times—to a time when Noah, according to Divine instruction, had filled the Ark with two of every living kind, we can imagine a pair of these geese a trifle late to gain entrance through the sealed doors of the ark, swimming round and round the vessel, noisily clamoring for admission.

And doubtless, by delving into the past long before the days of Noah, we would learn that at the time Adam and Eve partook of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, these honkers, nameless at this time, dressed in gala-day suits of lead-color, black and white, waddled up to Adam and from him received their names—names by which they were always to be known; and, after being duly classified by him, departed for the first time on their annual migrations toward the extreme northern countries, a habit they have ever since been addicted to, and which all subsequent generations of geese have inherited.

Their breeding-place is in the far North; so far indeed, that they go beyond the possibility of pursuit by human foes. When the winter months have faded away, and the uncertainty of the season is apparent, at a time when our minds are in doubt as to whether or not spring has come, they begin their annual migrations, and rising to a height of from one to three hundred yards, set out on their apparently endless journey. The pedestrian in the Southern States hears their familiar honk, looks up towards the sky, and sees them, led by an old gander, in a triangular shaped flock, headed for the North. In the Middle States, their welcome cries in mid-air are heard, their well-known forms are seen, and they bring pleasant recollections of warm rains, gentle winds and budding flowers. At our feet we see the snow fast melting into the mould, running trickling along on its course to the sea. And these geese, sure precursors of approaching spring, the vernal season we all like so well, receive from us a cordial nod of welcome, as we gaze with upturned faces and watch them as they disappear in the dim distance.

In the North, in the extreme Northern States, their flight goes on, apparently never ending. The green verdure of the Southern States, the swollen streams and melting snow of the Middle States, the frozen earth of the Northern covered with a mantle of pure white, all are passed over, and still their unceasing flight continues. They are bound, some of them, for a place where, in the solitude of the frigid zone, amid icebergs, and among seals, walrus and their kind, they may spend months in a clime uninhabited, and where night is turned into constant day.

They are easily domesticated, readily become accustomed to civilization, and enjoy captivity. They are familiar to us all, and a constant source of delight to children, as they are seen picking the sprouting grass, preening themselves, or indolently swimming in artificial ponds, in perfect contentment. But when spring-time comes, their inherent love of flight and wandering returns to them, and uneasily looking at the fleeting clouds, and answering the loud calls of their companions high in air, bound for the North, they have often been known to arise, leave their home of adoption and join their newly-found friends, and accompany them on their distant journey. An instance is given of a female departing in the spring and returning the next fall, bringing two of her brood, and alighting in the yard from whence she left. That it was the same goose there could be no question, from private and well-known marks ; besides, she assumed a familiarity with her surroundings that no strange goose could have manifested.

They are a long-lived bird, and had they the power of speech, could relate many incidents within their personal recollection, that would put to shame the stories

of the oldest inhabitant, and amateur fisherman, or the owner of a setter dog. It is a matter of history of a goose in captivity being killed at the age of 80 years, necessity compelling his removal at that tender age, on account of his mischievousness. Think of it! Having to be killed at the age of 80 because of mischievousness. It does seem, that at that time of life, childish and youthful tricks ought to have been discarded ; but for aught we know, this same goose may have been in its earliest childhood ; perhaps even the age of adolescence had not been reached. And what age he might have attained, had he not by his own playful indiscretions invited his own destruction, it is impossible to predict. After being acquainted with the sad decapitation of the departed goose, cut off in the spring-time of his earthly career, I am fully convinced of the extreme age many old ganders I have killed must have reached. One in particular, I have in mind. At the time of his dissolution and when compelled to bid adieu to all worldly affairs he was the leader of a large flock, coming into my decoys. His immense size, appearing almost a third larger than his companions, at once attracted my attention. At the report of my gun he fell with a loud thud on the frozen ground. When I picked him up, his every appearance convinced me that he was a patriarch ; little gray hairs streaked through the glossy black on his head, around his eyes tiny wrinkles were visible—everything in fact satisfied me that his age was great. His enlarged neck, his body weighing 13 pounds, and his general appearance filled me with awe, not unmixed with admiration ; and the thought occurred to me, that if a goose at the tender age of 80 years is killed because of mischievousness, how old must

this fellow be? Perhaps he had sat upon a cake of ice floating down the Delaware on that historic morning when Washington crossed in the dim twilight,—perhaps at an earlier era in our country's infancy he arose in alarm from a sand-bar in the Mississippi as De Soto, on his voyage of discovery, beheld for the first time with the eyes of a white man that broad-flowing majestic stream. I have always had a great respect for old age, and have ever felt satisfied that that goose was the oldest and toughest animated thing I ever saw.

The different ways of hunting geese are entirely dependent on the locality where they are hunted. The manner of hunting them on the Mississippi could not be adopted in Nebraska or Kansas. On the other hand, the way they are hunted in those States could not be followed advantageously on the Mississippi river. They are shot on the Mississippi and Missouri rivers from sand bars, again on the Mississippi from scull-boats. This cannot be done on the Missouri because of the swift current. But the most successful manner of shooting is that practiced in Nebraska and Dakota, namely, over decoys. The decoys are made of tin, iron or wood, still better, the thin hard seating used in chairs. They should be light, portable, and taking up the smallest space possible, and made to fold. They should always be made "profile," the body one piece, then the neck fastened to it by rivets, then an iron rod extending down from the body about eighteen inches, sharpened at the end, so it can be pushed into the ground. The neck folds close to the body, as does this iron rod, when not in service, and they take up but little room in wagon or boat. They should be painted with live colors, the crescent shape of white underneath the head,

and wherever white may be seen on the live bird should be brought out in strong contrast against the lead color of the body and the black on the head and neck. The hunter must dress warm, and in clothing suitable and in strong sympathy with his surroundings; there must be no distinction between his dress and the dress of the trees, sand, corn, stubble field, or wherever he may be hid. These huge birds are wary according to their size, and look with suspicion at every thing, and one can rest assured that every goose he shoots he will earn, unless he should be in a country where they are so plenty as to do away with the necessity of exercising much skill and ingenuity in hunting them,—even then, he will find the number killed very small, unless he dresses and hunts with judgment.

While they are a large mark to shoot at, it takes a hard hitting gun to bring them down, plenty of powder, good and strong, and rare skill in shooting at the right time. The sizes of shot used by the very best of goose hunters vary, ranging from No. 4 to BB, and extremists use even larger. But taking into consideration the fact that most, if not all, good shooting guns are choke bored, and extreme choke at that, safety to both shooter and gun doesn't warrant the using of any size larger than BB's. The bore of the gun also depends on the peculiar idea of its owner. While some will not be satisfied with a six bore, an immense charge of powder and two oz of shot; on the other hand, the extremist the other way contends that a 20 bore, and 1-2 oz. of shot is the great and only road to success. The majority of hunters use 10 and 12 gauge, and where they are properly loaded and well handled, their owners have no cause to fear the 6 bore cannon, or to blush as

against the toy 20 bore. In my goose shooting I use a 30 inch barrel, 10 bore, full choke, weighing 10 lbs. loaded with 6 dms. powder, well and solidly wadded, and 1 oz. No. 2 chilled shot. It is a load used by myself and companions while goose shooting for years, and there has never been any occasion to complain of the result, when geese are within distance, and the shooter holds right.

The goose hunter should never carry with him but one kind of call—that, the one Nature furnished him with. No other that I have ever seen or heard is a success. A fair sample of an artificial call such as is usually sold, is one that emits indescribable sounds, unlike those ever issued from the throat of any bird, which gives one a strange conglomeration of noises, imitating in part a brant, a goose, a wounded crane, a squawking duck and a cat-bird, with the brand "Goose Call" on the stem. The best place for such a call is in the shop. Let the hunter have such an one secreted in his pocket, let him go with an experienced shooter in a scull-boat on the Mississippi, on a sand bar, in a blind on the Missouri, in a bunch of straggling willows on the Platte River, in the pits, in the stubble fields of Dakota, —blow it once when geese are approaching decoys, and he will see frightened geese, a disgusted hunter, and a "goose-call" crushed to pieces, or disappear floating and bobbing down stream with the current; while his companion casts a look of doubt at him, as if mentally pondering whether or not he is *compos mentis* to bring such a thing as that along.

It is commonly supposed that goose shooting is very simple, and that they are an easy bird to hit. This is both true and false —true, when they come slowly

over one's head, perhaps thirty yards high, facing a moderately strong wind; false, in almost every other way. They are swift of flight, and when a single goose comes down wind in a hurry to meet an appointment, or to get there ahead of some companion who has gone by some other route, a train of cars going forty-five miles an hour is slow compared with the speed such a goose will travel. Let a goose travel in that way low down, say ten or twenty feet from the ground, how will the amateur judge his distance, and how to shoot? He sees a big body going along swiftly; it seems to him the bird is going at a lively rate, still, he recalls how he has seen their lumbering forms buffeting against a strong wind, or how he has seen them hovering over the corn-fields, and it doesn't seem to him they can fly fast if they tried; besides, the goose being not far from the ground, seems so very close to him, he sees the black neck and head, thinks the bird not over 30 to 35 yards, holds possibly a foot, may be two feet, ahead of him and fires. Of course he misses, for the bird is fully 50 yards from him, and going like the wind. He ought to hold fully four feet ahead. They are the most deceptive bird that flies to judge their distance, and always look from twenty to forty yards nearer than they actually are. This is caused by their great size, and the position the shooter is placed in. He must always be well hid, frequently in a cramped or strained position peering through the blind on the bow of his boat, peeping from behind an old log, squinting through a clump of bushes, or lying flat on his back, trying to catch side glances of the coming bird, by sighting over the bridge of his nose, while he writhes around on the ground serpent-like, trying to always keep the geese in

sight, without their noticing his slight movements.

The advance of civilization has great effect on Canada Geese. The draining of the places where they were wont to feed, on their flights from the Mississippi, having deprived them of the luxury of bulbous roots which they like so well as a dessert, after filling their greedy selves with barley, buckwheat and corn, has driven them to a great degree from the Mississippi Valley to the Missouri slope, and to the open and exposed fields of Nebraska and Dakota. At this late day, one is not warranted in expecting to find goose-shooting sufficiently good on the Mississippi as to hunt for them and them alone, and those that are now killed are shot by duck-hunters while in pursuit of that species of water-fowl.

The best time to shoot them is in the spring, when in making their periodical migrations they stop for a short time for rest and food. The warm sun late in March, or early in April, melts the ice in little sloughs and bayous, swelling the rushing floods from creeks and ravines, all commingling with the river. The river rises a little—the snow melts on the banks and trickles down, the ice parts from the shore, and soon a surging, crushing mass of ice fills the river with floes of all sizes and descriptions, their snowy edges peering up in the bright sun, while, peeping through these drifting cakes, occasional streaks and spots of dark blue can be seen, as the water ripples plainly out in view. At such times as these, the geese will alight on a floating cake of ice, and with an old gander on picket duty will sleepily and lazily drift down with the strong current, seeming to enjoy the warm sun, the circling ducks, the crushing ice, and the rattling banks, as they

cave off and fall into the river with a loud splash. And still better than this, they like to sit on some outstretched sand-bar, whose long arm extends far into the channel, away from land, from willows and all places that could afford concealment to the hunter. On these bars, covering acres of surface, where the flowing water and sand have frozen together, the ice tenaciously holds, and floating cakes urged and forced along by the clashing mass are hurled up, piling ten to thirty feet high on the out-jetting point. This is the spot they like best in all the river, for they feel comparatively safe here.

The hunter in the scull-boat, attracted to this place of resort by frequent honks, starts for them, first "trimming" his boat. The boat is low, and her decks extend but a slight distance above the water, decked over at bow and sides. There is abundant room to make an excellent blind. This is done by sprinkling mud and sand over bow and sides for a foundation, then arranging the cakes of ice on bow and sides with greatest care, so that when coming down the river, the boat will seem like a small ice-cake, drifting with the current. The ice must be placed on the bow high enough to hide the sculler and companion from the birds. On the side, thin sheets of ice, resting on the outer combing, a combing half an inch high at the outside, then leaning against the five-inch gunwale more ice, until the whole resembles an ice floe, about 12 feet long, four feet wide and from ten inches to two feet high. When the boat is finished it must be trimmed with the greatest nicety, so that when the two hunters are in position, it will be perfectly balanced, with the boat's nose or bow well loaded down, as it then sculls and handles easier.

The shooter is in the bow, sitting on the hay in the bottom of the boat—no seats—is silently watching through a peep-hole in the ice, the distant geese. The sculler, half sitting, half reclining, easily propels the boat along, by his sculling oar bound with leather, and working in the sculling hole in the stern of the boat. The boat moves with the current then, seeing a huge cake that looks as if it might crush the boat coming right at it, the sculler with a few rapid strokes shoots the boat quickly forward, and the immense cake floats idly along, not even grazing the boat ; then again, to avoid another, he holds to the ice with oar or hand until some piece passes them, for they not only want to avoid being caught between the cakes, but also to keep from making the slightest noise. So well are they hidden that blue-bills sweep over them so near they can almost feel the wind of their wings, mallards circle around them, pin-tails whistle in the air ; then a lone canvas-back, with long neck stretched out, comes right by them within twenty yards, the sculler shuts his lips firmly together. A strong temptation ; but he resists it, and the canvas-back, unaware of his narrow escape goes steadily along. A slight breeze is blowing, the sculler takes advantage of it ; he knows well that the geese will rise against the wind, offering him side shots. Now mark ! the scull-boat is within 80 yards of the geese, and the utmost skill of the sculler is called into play ; his form slides down, down into the bottom of the boat; now he uses but one hand, yet that hand works steadily and regularly as a clock ; silently the oar cleaves the water, never making a ripple. Nothing can now be seen except that silent hand working to and fro, giving the lateral and propelling power to the oar.

CANADA GOOSE SHOOTING.

The geese, fifteen in number, stand silently on the ice-covered bar, some asleep, with heads under their wings, some standing like statues in the clear light, others moving slowly to and fro, while the old gander occasionally gives a reassuring honk, as if to tell them that "all's well." Suddenly and quickly he turns and looks inquiringly and intently at the-ice covered boat. No quicker was he than the sculler, for instantaneously the sculler's hand is still, and two cool eyes look steadily through the thick blind at the flock. The gander gives a low honk of warning ; at once heads are drawn from beneath their wings ; the walking is stopped ; and they all turn toward the approaching object and look at it with suspicion. How the sculler reads their thoughts ! He knows that there is no danger of flight, until some greater uneasiness than this is shown, until they have chattered in consultation, or have walked inquiringly around for a closer examination. They seem reassured and relapse into their former state of inactivity. The boat is now near enough for the hunters to shoot. The sculler softly but sharply whistles. Quick as lightning fifteen black necks are stretched in air ; they begin to honk, to gather themselves for flight. A swift movement of the sculling oar veers the boat, and from bow to stern the guns roar, followed by the honking of the frightened and escaping birds. The boat is forced up on the bar, cripples secured, dead picked up, and we count seven Canada geese in the boat.

Shooting geese on sand-bars is done with or without decoys ; the latter being the most successful way. Many old hunters go on year after year not profiting by the experience of their fellow craft, and shoot these birds on sand-bars as they come in at night, depending

entirely on their great experience and judgment to select a place where the geese will come in to roost. If they would only use decoys they would more than double their success ; as the geese flying around and intending after some promiscuous sailing, to alight on the same bar, will avoid it at the sight of the least suspicious object, whereas, with decoys they naturally presume from the fact of seeing those of their kind, that things are all right, and come in without hesitancy.

The difficulty met with in bar-shooting generally is in making a suitable blind. But the hunter is equal to the emergency. He selects a sand-bar where he has noticed geese roost at night, digs a hole, and sinks a barrel or shallow box—the latter he can lie down in—places it beneath the sand, where its top will be about level with the surface of the bar, puts some hay in the bottom upon which to lie, sets his decoys out, goes to his blind late in the afternoon and patiently waits for the expected geese.

If he does not make a blind such as described, he takes advantage of the protecting shadow of an old stump or log, hugs close to it, and is as still and immovable as the log itself, until the proper time arrives to shoot. Then again, dressed in dirty old canvas clothes, pants drawn over his long boots to cover their blackness, with hat the color of the sand, he lies on a tan-colored rubber blanket, sprinkles sand on its outer edges, puts a liberal supply over his feet and legs, and waits silently for the coming geese. He fires when they are over land, for should the dead fall in the water, the swift current speedily carries them away, and he knows it is almost impossible to capture a cripple in a swift flowing stream.

The flight begins about sundown, and they keep coming in until dark, and long after dark, but there is never any doubt of their coming, for they are as regular in their coming and going as the day itself.

On moonlight nights, they frequently delay their arrival till after the sun has set, and twilight disappeared, flying in in great, discordant, honking flocks. The air is alive with dim forms, shown sufficiently plain by the moon's soft light, to afford fair aim to the shooter. The hoarse "Ah–unk, Ah–unk," of the Canadas; the "Ah–ul, Ah–ul" of the Hutchin's geese, the shrill cry of the brant, the chattering of the snow-geese,—all uttered at the same time, makes a babel of voices absolutely deafening. The snowy-white of the laughing goose, the larger brant, the still larger Hutchin's goose, circle around the hunter, but he pays no attention to them; for another kind he bides his time.

"The rising moon has hid the stars
Her level rays like golden bars
Lie on the landscape green,
With shadows brown between.
And silver-white the river gleams
As if Diana, in her dreams,
Had dropped her silver bow."

Facing the moon he sees great phantom forms dimly by her light, and as these shadows pass before her bright face, he rises and hastily fires—the darkness, the smoke, prohibit his seeing anything. For an instant, blinded as he is by the streak of fire that leaps from his gun, he listens. Thump! Thump! he hears on the sand; then a swish on the water. He knows two have fallen on the ground, and a third in the water. He runs and hastily picks them off the sand-bar, but

pays no attention to the one in the water, knowing it cannot be had. The two he has are the largest of their kind.

And now that we have seen how geese are killed from sculling boats on the Mississippi, on sand-bars in the Missouri, the Mississippi and Platte rivers, let us ascend the ladder of goose-shooting farther, and having passed its lower rounds, seat ourselves for a while on its pinnacle, and from that extreme height, forget for a time the milk of the articles written of or on sculling and sand-bars, and partake of the cream of this grand sport, which we will skim off from the plains of Nebraska and the fields of Dakota. I have hunted geese in both. But the scenes and incidents described will be from actual experience in Nebraska near the Platte river. Many of you have been over the Union Pacific Railroad through Nebraska, and are quite familiar with its scenery. Level and flat, with slight, and very slight, undulations, a country where the eye can look forth on a plain, and see the blue sky kissing the waving grass, forming a distant line, miles and miles from the observer, a perfect ocean of prairie land.

The time of goose-shooting here is both in spring and fall. In the spring, being on their journey to the North, warm days makes them uneasy. They dislike to stay, and feeling that their summer residence is in repair, and waiting for occupancy, they hurriedly depart.

In the fall it is different. They are returning bound for their Southern homes. Coming as they do as the advance-guard, the sure precursors of cold wintry months, they seem to have confidence in their ability to keep in advance of howling winds and drifting snows, and make a long and welcome visit on the Platte.

They arrive in large numbers, from the first to the middle of November, and only leave when frozen rivers and snow-covered ground warns them to depart. They roost on the sand bars in the Platte River. At dawn of day they fly out to their feeding grounds, return to the river about ten A. M., sit idly on the bars, picking up gravel, or asleep, until three or four in the afternoon; then go to the fields again for feed, stay till sundown, then come back to the river, where they remain till morning. This performance is gone through with day after day, always without variance. So regular are they on their arrival and departure that after timing them for two or three days, one could set one's watch by the flight of these birds, and could safely wager on its being within fifteen minutes of standard time. When they are ready to start out to feed, they first show uneasiness in their movements, a few sharp honks of the ganders calls "attention, company!" Then after preliminary flapping of wings by some, one flock will leave, soon another, then another at short intervals, until the bar is deserted. The first flock sets the course, and the balance fly nearly as possible over the same route. The hunter knows this and hides himself in the grass, in the corn, or behind a fence, and gets flight shooting. The birds are ever on the watch, avoid corn fields and grassy spots when they can, and will almost invariably rise in their flight when going over a fence. Windy days are best for shooting. The hunter should choose a day when they will fly against a strong head wind, going or returning from their feeding grounds. At such times they fly low and are easily shot.

There is a peculiarity about their feeding; that is, where they go to feed. They will fly from the river,

going ten, even fifteen miles to feed, passing over the choicest corn, buckwheat, stubble and plowed ground, and then alight and feed in a spot not nearly as rich as safe or as protected as many of those passed over.

The most successful manner, indeed the only way to shoot them, after they leave the river, is to shoot them over decoys, using such profile decoys as I have described. The hunter firing from pits dug in the ground. The pits are usually dug before the day of shooting. The hunter notes where the geese have been coming in to feed, and there he digs a round hole, sufficiently deep, that when on his knees (an unusual position for most hunters), by elevating his head a little, he can peep over the edge of the hole. The diameter of the pit should be large enough to allow him to turn easily and quickly, that he may shoot from any direction without inconvenience. The dirt thrown out is carefully smashed or hid with grass; the edges of the blind sprinkled with a little hay and an occasional corn stalk, so that everything will look natural. He then places out his decoys, scattered all around him, forming a circle about thirty yards in diameter. He being in his pit in the centre, great care is taken that the decoys shall be placed so that the broad side of the profile will show plainly from any direction the geese may come.

Less than four years ago my brother George and myself spent two days with these honkers, near the Platte river. One cold November morning, almost in December, found us at break of day, impatiently waiting the flight, secreted in the recesses of an old fence, thoroughly hidden from sight by great tumbling weeds, which the Northwest wind drove upon us. The whis-

tling wind, the flurrying snow, the obscure fields, seen indistinctly in the faint light of approaching day,—all seemed cold and cheerless. Suddenly George called, "Mark, south!" A heavy shaped line was pointed toward us. A guttural honk came from the leader, he received an answer from George which was so true, that although I expected it, it fairly startled me. On they came, now straight ahead, then the strong wind would veer them. With renewed and extra strength they came against it, arising to a greater height in crossing the fence. Too far for me, but George quickly arose, two loud reports rang out in the blustering air, and two geese fell dead. A pretty double shot. At the report of the gun the flock tried to escape. The strong wind caught them, and like a flash they were carried a hundred yards, when they again advanced, far to our right, honking excitedly.

It was now daylight, and the flight was at its thickest. We lay hidden in behind the fence, improving every opportunity. Our decoys were near us in the pasture, but did us but little good, the geese flying around them, then alighting in the centre of the field, seeming to be afraid of the fence, we saw the trouble, but it was too late to remedy it, for geese were in sight nearly all the time. Our shots were long and high, but we were as successful as could be expected, situated as we were. A large flock coming right over. We knocked down three; then from another we would get one, sometimes two and from one flock I succeeded in getting three, two with my first, one with my second barrel. At this time the sun had risen, the geese had all left the river. We knew the shooting had stopped, and picking up the dead, found we had ten. Afterwards picking up another, we saw fall far from us, fully half a mile.

There is one thing the hunter should never forget, that is, to mark the flight of a goose he feels satisfied he has hit hard. They will often fly off, to all appearances unhurt, only to let go everything after flying from 75 to 500 yards, and then fall stone dead, making a resounding thud on the frozen ground, not unlike thumping the earth with a stuffed club. It is surprising how far one can hear this thud, and I can safely say, without fear of contradiction, that a goose falling on the frozen ground from a height of sixty to eighty yards with a slight wind blowing toward the shooter, the thud can be heard three quarters of a mile, if not farther. Geese are very tenacious of life, and sometimes after being hard hit will rise in the air, set their wings, and sail toward the earth, slightly descending, without a quiver of their set wings, and finally alight softly on their feet, teeter forward, then backward, and pitch forward again dead, with outstretched wings. As we were riding along through the tall bottom grass, which in the low land waved its flaunting yellow points at our sides, occasionally we heard the faint honk of a goose. We tried our best to locate it, scanning closely every point of the now blue sky. At the North, hung heavily against the heavens a long stretch of what the residents called bluffs. They were hills, reaching perhaps an actual elevation of fifty feet, sloping gently back from the bottom land. We were coming from the South, and as far as the eye could see in the direction of the East and West, there was one unbroken line of rank coarse slough grass interspersed with fields of yellow corn, and an occasional farm house, that stood out in bold relief against the bright sky, with its drifting white and blue clouds. The driver called our

attention to the broken line of grass, and knowing there was an opening of some kind, drove toward it. All was silent as death, not a sound could be heard, except that made by ourselves. As we emerged from the tall grass, what a sight there was before us! Never did I see a sight so novel, so thoroughly impressive. I am a lover of Nature, and more than half the pleasure of the chase is afforded me by what I see and hear, when out in the solitude of the woods, floating on the rippling water, or feeling the cheerful wind as it gently plays around, thrilling through me when on the open prairie. There, right before us, stood an army. Yes, an army—not of men, but of geese. They were in complete possession of an old pasture, containing about eighty acres; from whose surface the grass had been so closely cropped by herds of cattle that the grass struggled through the ground striving hard for an existence. The pasture itself was level; as level as a floor, and here and there were congregated a vast multitude of geese, encamped like soldiers of some great commonwealth, calmly resting, passively recruiting their fatigued bodies, after some tiresome foraging expedition. At one point, aside from the main flock a knot of five or six stood as if in consultation. These evidently were the generals and officers, planning some gigantic attack on the neighboring stubble or corn fields. Here and there sentinels paced leisurely along, the warning guards for the indolent tribe; then again we saw them in platoons, in corps, in companies, in regiments, all trying to catch their noon-day nap. They were scattered this way throughout the entire field. To make the scene still more realistic, the mass of gray and black was prominently relieved by miniature walls

of pure white, as we gazed at the huddled bunches of snow-geese, standing closely together, forming tents of the purest white, we imagined them the legions of a vast encampment.

How often that sight has returned to me, and how I have wished that nature had endowed me with the skill to have sketched, then reproduced in oil that grand scene, for I have always felt that it was the acme, the extreme, the most picturesquely beautiful of any I had ever seen of wild life.

We had a span of young horses ; they were fiery and restless ; they were anxious to go, and the wind blowing fresh, the ground hard, smooth and free from ruts, we told the driver to let them run. Off they went like the wind, toward the geese. A few preliminary honks, and then a thousand gray bodies moved closely together and stretched up their long black necks in wonder and affright. As we neared them, from a thousand throats discordant sounds were uttered by the frightened birds. We gained on them, but their long, slow sweep of wide wings was too much for speedy horses, and the field was soon left to our control and occupancy.

It was extremely foolish to have done this, but carried away with excitement and thinking they would return again later in the afternoon, we drove them out thoroughly alarmed.

Our blind we made in the centre of the field, far from the fence. We at first thought it impossible to make one that would conceal us, and not frighten the geese. I had noticed a sprinkling of corn stalks scattered here and there on the black ground, and we decided to have a blind. We spread an old horse blanket on the damp ground, got some hay, a few corn stalks,

put a little hay under the blanket for a pillow, set out our decoys, laid ourselves down, carefully sprinkled a little hay and a few stalks over us, and thanking St. Hubert (the sainted huntsman) that our corporosity was not Sancho Panzan, patiently waited the result of our experiment.

We did not wait long. A wandering goose, alone, a prodigal, returned, answered our call, and coming over us at a height of fully 60 yards, was shot dead. After being hit it came down straight for our blind, like a chunk of lead. We sprung quickly out, involuntarily admitting its right of possession. Down it came, a gray streak. I dodged, and it struck the ground with terrific force, not three feet from me. Had that goose struck me, it would have fallen on George to have performed the unpleasant duty of telling just how I had been killed. We afterwards learned it weighed a trifle over 12 lbs. We were now satisfied our blind was a success, and expected fun throughout the afternoon, and we were not disappointed. A flock returning from the river, away up, headed for us. We "honked," but no reply; again we tried, still no answer. "I'm afraid they will pass us," said George. Just then a coarse "Ah-unk" vibrated in the air, and we knew that settled it, that they would come down. For a moment all was still except our soliciting cries; then "Ah-unk, Ah-unk," they answered in quick succession. From their great height they started, each trying to get ahead of the other. They came down almost perpendicularly, with a swift, waiving, swinging flight, apparently allowing their weight to sink them and only using their wings to steady themselves, giving a peculiar lateral motion, swerving their bodies first one side, then the

other, as we often see mallards, blue-bills, or pin-tails do when coming down vertically from a great height to alight among their kind. They were fully 100 yards behind us. Lying on the flat of our backs we could not see very well, and dared not move. George bent back his head and watched them through a peep-hole in his eyebrows ; while I could indistinctly see them by looking cross-eyed over the end of my nose. On they came with set wings, right over us. We let them pass by ; they were only about 30 yards above and from us. Quickly arising to a sitting position, we let drive, George at the left wing of the flock, I at the right, and down came four, each making a double. George turned to me, never cracking a smile, and said "Shake." I put on a serio-comic look, accepted his proffered hand, and looking him straight in the face remarked that it was a "beautiful day." "Very" replied he, and then he burst out into a loud laugh. There is a quiet satisfaction that can only be known, and must have been experienced, to enjoy, when two hunters both make "doubles." Nothing may be said at the time, perhaps not at all, but they both appreciate it just the same.

A large flock coming toward us quickly turned off, as if in fright. The cause was clear, a young man was approaching us in the exposed field. Walking directly up to us, he commenced to talk, and his first words disclosed his misfortune,—an impediment in his speech.

Said he, "I-yi-yi thu-thu-ought I-yi-yi wou-wu-would cu-cu-cu-ome o-o-over."

"You are welcome, young man," replied George, "but don't you see we are in a blind, and geese coming all the time? They will see you. If we can do anything for you, we will gladly do so, but let us know at once, and then move quickly."

"I-yi-yi am in no hu-hu-hurry," replied he, "gu-gu-guess I-yi-yi wi-wi-will ge-ge-get in th-th-the b-bl-lind wi-wi-with you." Then he gave a gulp to catch more wind.

"Well, I guess you won't," said George, "we have built this blind, were here first, and don't hardly think we will let you in with those dark clothes, to spoil our shooting; besides, the geese are apt to return any time, and you had better go."

"Du-du-don't bu-bu-be a-la-la-larmed," said he, "the gu-gu-geese wo-wo-won't be hu-hu-here till qua-wah-warter after thu-thur-ree."

Well, thought I, this young man has got the goose time-table down pretty fine, and told him so.

"It's aw-aw-all ri-ri-right," he replied, "you-you wi-wi-will see. Th-he-they lull-lull-leave the plull-lill-latt at thu-thu-thu-ree, and get hu-hu-here qua-wah-warter after thu-thu-thu-ree."

George looked at his watch and smilingly said, "It's ten minutes after three now, and according to what you say they ought to be here soon."

The boy looked at us in great alarm, "so-so la-late?" "I-yi-yi mu-mu-must be go-go-going and hi-hi-hide in a bu-bu-bl-lind, for th-th-they wi-wi-will su-su-soon bu-bu-be here." And away he started for another field. This boy had watched the flight of geese all the fall, and no doubt had noted the time of their going and coming; for, as I said before in this article, they are to be depended upon as to the time of their going to and from the feeding grounds; and by actually noting the time the first flock came, we killed a couple within five minutes of the time the boy said they would come. The boy wasn't out of sight, and when he saw us shoot,

waived his hat in the air, as much as to say, "I-yi-yi tu-tu-told you so." There was then a steady flight, not frequent, but of regular intervals for two hours, and we had splendid shooting, having killed 21 or 22 during the day.

Most ornithologists ascribe to Canada geese too little weight. While it is true some weigh six and seven pounds only, others go much higher, and we weighed 12 of the largest of the geese we killed, and found they averaged over 11 lbs. each.

What they call in Nebraska "Hutchin's geese," are exactly like the Canadas, but weigh six to eight pounds; they are more plenty than their larger cousins, and are killed in greater numbers.

The following morning at break of day, indeed before that time, we were in our "pits" in an old corn field—a bitter cold morning, 6° below zero. We had excellent sport, and the heavy thud of the dead geese was very exhilarating. We needed something to warm us up, and—really, I have forgotten whether or not Nebraska is a prohibition State. Yes, I think it is; anyway, the falling of the geese warmed us up. During the afternoon we had a practical illustration of what a "fool of a goose" is. One came over our blind, sailed and circled around, apparently afraid to come to the decoys. At last he came over, way up where it would have been an accident to have killed him. Both barrels were fired at him, and he flew off unhurt. There being no others moving, we watched him. He went on and on for fully a mile, then came back, set his wings, sailed in over the decoys, and would have lit, had he not been killed within twenty yards of us. During the day we killed 23, mostly Canadas.

Now, a word to the amateur goose hunters. Of course, to hunt them with success you must go where they are, and go prepared. Never go without profile decoys. When you arrive at your destination, if a stranger, get acquainted with some local hunter who knows the grounds, and how to hunt them. Follow his advice. But be extremely cautious about writing for a good place to go ; always bear in mind that there are descendants of Ananias living wherever game frequents. I can say this with safety and confidence, for I once took a trip on a "wild goose chase," and was badly deceived, wilfully too, for the man who wrote me knew shooting was very poor, "but thought it might be all right by time I got there." Then be extremely cautious where and when you go, and when you find the right place, improve it. Practice the imitation of their cries, and always answer their call, as near as you can. If you are sure they are coming to your decoys, don't call too often, lest they discover the deception; but call softly, just so they will hear you, and they will come near to you. Place your hand over your mouth, so the hollow of your hand will throw the sound down to the ground, then call gently in a soothing, coaxing tone ; you are trying to win their confidence now, and must use your sweetest notes. Should you wing a goose, tie it among or very near the decoys, it will prove obstinate at first, and sullenly lay for a time with neck outstretched, but will soon get over that, and standing on its feet will call loudly to its companions, as they fly over. You will find this call an improvement on your own, even if you get to be an expert at calling them ; besides, the goose will be quickly noticed, as it moves around, restrained by the string by which it is secured.

The descriptions given here of the manner of hunting geese apply to all species found throughout the Northwest. I have confined this sketch to the shooting of Canada geese, because they are the largest and most desirable to hunt. With them, throughout Nebraska and Dakota will be found associated all other varieties, such as Hutchin's, Snow or Laughing goose, and Brant. In the long narrative given of their habits and resorts I have explained fully how to find them, and after having found them, how to hunt them according to the most approved method. If I have succeeded in this, then my object has been accomplished; and the reader can rest assured, that should he be blessed with the opportunity of finding the flight of these birds, which can only be done at the right season and place, and will then try to remember the result of my own practical experiences as set forth by me, and bearing them always in mind, faithfully follow them he cannot fail of success, and will feel more than repaid for his patience in carefully reading this chapter, for in it is shown how to find and kill wild geese under all circumstances.

CHAPTER XXXII.

BOATS.

No duck-hunter can consider his hunting outfit complete without a boat. It doesn't matter whether he is in the vicinity of water, where a boat may be used to advantage, or whether he lives far from ponds of considerable size, lakes, or rivers. If he expects to hunt ducks and do so with success, he should have a boat. The fact that he owns an excellent retriever does not alter the case. Perhaps this is putting the matter almost too strong, but my desire is to impress on the mind of the beginner that to wage war successfully he must be properly accoutred. We can easily imagine spots where most excellent duck-shooting may be had in corn-fields, small, grassy prairie ponds, marshes and like places, when a boat is not a necessity —on the contrary, an inconvenience. But such places as these are the exception and not the rule, and no matter how good a dog one has, in overflow, points over decoys and in large marshes, and especially in deep and swift water, the hunter finds himself at great disadvantage unless he has a boat at hand. A dog at such places is also at times a necessity, but a boat is desirable to reach the feeding grounds, or a point where the flight is constantly passing over, or to pass over and across a deep stream, and finally locate the hunter where ducks are having their midday frolic and

repasts. Your long boots will not do it. Your desires are strong, your hearts are willing to go to this place, but at your feet there flows deep, gurgling water, frowning at you in murky sullenness; or seeming to pleasantly smile, as tiny eddies revolve on its surface, then silently disappear. Has the reader ever experienced this? When he has approached just such a stream as this unawares, having constantly in view circling ducks, long-necked pin-tails, swishing blue-bills, darting red-heads and gently-alighting mallards, their quacking greeting your willing ears with sweetest cadence, you see them dropping in only about one hundred yards in advance of you, never thinking for a moment there is anything to prevent your getting among them, until suddenly you step forth from beneath the scraggy trees or the tall rice, and find deep water an impassable barrier. Have you ever been there? If you have, I know perfectly well how you felt. The experience is very fresh in my mind how I once came to a place of this kind, and was stopped by a flowing and apparently endless stream. At my side was my companion, one of the best retrievers that ever lived. We stood there watching the flight, unable to get near the birds. The dog took in the prospect and would cast his brown eyes sorrowfully on me, as if regretting the situation. I stood at this place for hours, shooting at high-flyers and stragglers, while all the time in this haven they had found, I could constantly see a deluge of feathers dropping down through the trees. How I wished for a boat, a raft—in fact anything to have gotten across. As it was, I killed twelve mallards; as it should have been, with a boat, no doubt I would have bagged from seventy-five to one hundred.

What kind of a boat a person requires depends entirely on where he expects to use it. When he has fully made up his mind to have a boat, he should as fully and knowingly decide what style of boat he wants. Remember this, that there is a great similarity in duck-shooting on all Western waters, whether in timber, river, lake or marsh, and a boat that will do in one place will do in almost every other. This being the case the hunter should buy or build one that will answer for all places. Do not expect to combine great speed, sea-going qualities, lightness of draught and weight, all in one hunting-boat, or you will be disappointed. These combined, make too many virtues for one frail craft to carry. The one great desideratum in a duck-boat, the thing to which every other is as naught, is *safety* above all things else. Bear this in mind when you select the boat, so that when you are possessed of one, your imagination cannot depict to you circumstances and times when you will fear danger by upsetting or swamping. Your life is dependent on the staunchness and build of your boat. I won't say *skiff*, for a skiff isn't a hunting boat. It is all right for what it is intended, but was never intended to hunt with, except as a dray for luggage. When you have fully made up your mind on a boat, consider that in duck-shooting the boat must be used in lakes and rivers, in ponds and marshes, in swift-flowing streams, streams surging and seething from recent rains and melted snows; that unaided by human power, the boat carried along at five, six, and even eight miles an hour, when coming suddenly around some willow point, is driven by the torrent of waters entirely beyond your control, it shoots ahead and becomes entangled in sticks

and logs and floating debris, and quickly strands on some submerged tree, whose roots cling to the fast-washing bank. The boat swerves one way, then another, finally the water surges against its sides, then rushes beneath it, only to appear again on the opposite side, while hundreds of whirling eddies spin in the caldron of foam. In the spring overflows this is no exaggerated simile, but may be expected any time. Your boat should be one, then, that when you get in such places, no shadow of fear should pass over your face, no palpitation of the heart be experienced, no anxiety for family, no thought of unpaid and possibly expired life insurance policies. On the contrary, you should feel free to sit still and enjoy the scene, with perfect confidence in the safety of your boat, feeling that it cannot upset, and that the boiling eddies around you are powerless to engulf it; that in your boat nothing less than a maelstrom could bring disaster.

Then again, your boat will oftentimes be your companion. Mine has carried me through marshes in Illinois, rivers in Iowa, lakes in Dakota; indeed, I never think of going off on a duck hunt, when large bodies of water are to be hunted in, unless my boat goes with me. To have a boat that is easy to handle is an absolute necessity, for the boat must go by express, or as freight, or hauled on wagons and handled by men not noted for carefulness. This being the case, it should be short of length; to afford stability, it should be broad of beam; not to be conspicuous, it should sit low on the water; to afford a blind, it should be decked over at bow and sides, the combing of the cock-pit extending about four inches above the decking. When loaded and trimmed as a blind her guards should extend only

about three inches above the water. When choppy waves threaten to engulf you they will be speedily repelled by the combing of the pit. The waves at times seem about to break in on you. Instinctively you draw yourself together as one comes toward you; it breaks against the sides, overflows the decking, is warded off by the combing, then rapidly down along the boat's decking, and merrily trickles back into the water again, not a drop going into the boat. There is a vast fund of pleasure in hunting in one of these boats, that defies pen description. An illustration will show what can be done with them when other means fail.

A few years ago in Goose Lake, in this county, Mr. Ben Woodward and myself dropped in on the natives unannounced, with one of these boats and twenty-five decoys. When the inhabitants of the village saw us they volunteered the information that "we wouldn't kill a duck." Said there were some flying over the lake, but came in high and pitched down in the centre of the lake, and that no man could get them. We trimmed our boat to represent a muskrat house, laid portions of muskrat bed on the sides, pushed into grass about two feet high, lay flat on our backs until the ducks got right over our decoys, and that afternoon and the next forenoon bagged nearly 70 ducks. When we brought in the birds the citizens were greatly astounded. We were fêted (at our own expense), and accorded the freedom of the village.

To build a duck-boat requires practical as well as theoretical skill, and while I give in this article the measurements requisite to build one such as I use, which my experience has demonstrated to be the best in use, I would not advise an inexperienced person to

attempt to build one. The model must be perfect, the seams impervious to water, the joints, ribs and sides of uniform and correct proportions, and it would be far better to let an experienced boat builder build you one than to undertake it yourself. They should be built of white pine or cedar, and when finished with oars, locks and sculling oar, should cost from $40 to $60. A pretty steep price, think you? That depends on the way you look at it. If proper care is taken of it, it will last ten to twenty years. I saw one a year ago in use in excellent condition, that I used to hunt in when a boy, over twenty years ago. But no man deserves to have a good boat unless he knows how to take the best of care of it. When not in use, it should be protected from the weather in a cool, shady place. Before using in the spring and fall it should be carefully examined, and painted when needed. When taken on the cars, if possible to do so, load and unload it yourself. All brakemen "smoke," but they have very little respect for a hunting boat when the owner is absent. When conveyance is necessary on a wagon, slip an extra quarter into the hand of your bucolic driver and ask him to restrain Pegasus and Bucephalus; at the same time walk at the side of the wagon, and see that the wagon stakes don't shove a hole through the frail sides. A boat is a part of your outfit—the most important part. This being the case, your safety depending on it, as a matter of self-preservation, if not love for it, you should guard it. Are you a farmer, dear reader? If so, don't use your boat like your neighbor does his reaper, his harrow, his plow, his farm machinery, after he has finished his season's work, but give it a protected place and proper shelter. You should take just as good care

of it as you would of your gun. I know it is lots of trouble, but your reward in having a tight boat in excellent condition, ought to be sufficient recompense for the labor spent. In such a case one should feel, "*Labor ipse voluptas*,"—labor itself is a pleasure.

Canvas boats are made which are good and safe for hunting purposes. The Bond-metal boat is good and very handy; being sectional, it can be divided, and two shoot in it with safety, one in each section. For wild rice and marsh shooting the Wilson duck-boat is one of the finest I ever saw, but quite expensive. This boat is made of very heavy tin, equal to No. 24 iron, weight about 70 pounds. Any practical boat-builder can build you a boat, but be sure and have it made as *you* and not as he wants to make it. Following are the measurements of boats I use. They can be rowed, sculled or punted.

Length, 12 1–2 feet; beam, 3 ft. 6 in. to 4 ft.; depth, 10 1–2 inches; deck, 4 feet. There should be a rake of 10 in., commencing 5 feet from the stem, running back to the stern, so it will not drag and make a noise, and ripple. Stern board, five and a half inches. A rake should run up to bow, leaving bow 6 to 8 in. high. The bow should be shape of sled runner so as to glide easily over sticks and moss. Keelson, 5 inches wide, of oak. The best way to build a boat is of five-eighths strips midship one and a half inch wide, tapering to half an inch at ends; oak bows on inside 3–8ths in. thick, one and one quarter inch. wide, about 10 to 12 in. apart. Knees of oak, the edges of the strips forming the sides, should be thoroughly covered with white lead and nailed together every 4 to 6 in. through the edges. These strips should also be well nailed

through the oak ribs and clinched. Combing of cock-pit 4 in. above the decking; wash-board extending from combing of cock-pit about 8 in. wide. Fenders on side for row-locks. Make them half length of cock-pit; they will then do for carrying boat or dragging it. They should be a trifle higher than combing. Scull-hole in stern-board 4 in. from top of board, and two and one half inch in diameter. The hole should be lined with leather, or lead, and a tight fitting plug kept in when not in use. The scull-oar and oars where they come in contact with the locks and boat should be bound with leather. Use a half inch rope at the bow. If you use a chain—its noisy clanking will spoil many a chance for a shot.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE SHOT-GUN, AND HOW TO USE IT.

In a book of this kind, where wild fowl is the first, and every thing else a secondary consideration, the reader can readily see the impossibility of reviewing the shot-gun, except in a cursory manner; although a frank confession prompts me to admit I would like to.

The explosive force of gun powder having been discovered in the fourteenth century, active inquiry was made how to confine this destructive element to the purposes of war. And it is a matter of interest to be able to recall the fact that so long ago as that time breech-loading cannon were made. We cannot spare the time or space to dwell on these things that are a matter of history, but carried along as if by a panorama, let our thoughts dwell lightly on them, and consider them as they are, as of bygone ages.

In 1630 the flint lock was invented in Spain; for two centuries it was considered *par excellence* in the art of gun-making. At about the beginning of the nineteenth century Joseph Manton invented improvements, that made him the most renowned inventor of his day. Being a skilled artisan, ambitious, ever progressive and honest, his make of guns gained world renowned celebrity, and were considered perfect models of elegance and beauty, and unsurpassed in shooting powers.

In this article I shall only suggest such guns as are in my opinion suitable for wild fowl shooting, and advisable for the amateur to buy for that purpose. The days of the muzzle-loader having past, we cannot refer to them, except with sincere respect and loving regard for the many happy hours they have afforded us, and certainly, no man of a life experience with a shot gun can feel otherwise toward them. We must deposit them in the archives of memory, as instruments of departed worth.

In the selection of a gun for wild-fowl shooting, we will bear in mind it is for inland birds, and our object should be, to select such an one as will answer for other shooting as well. The standard gauges used in the West are Nos. 10 and 12, with the preponderance largely in favor of No. 10; although the tendency at the present time is for smaller bores. But this change is more for the trap and upland birds than for wild-fowl. As the young hunter desires to be put on an equal footing with his companions, his decision is for a ten bore, the reason being that he can use larger and more effective loads. He is merely a beginner and chance will aid him often, bringing down his bird with this gun when he would miss with a 16 or 20 bore, with a less charge of shot. To an expert, this does not necessarily apply; for an experienced shot will kill with an ounce of shot, with almost the same regularity he does with 1 1-4 oz., because he gauges the speed, the height and distance, and places no reliance on scattered pellets, but hits the bird fairly with the centre of the charge, or scores a clean miss.

Should the beginner decide on buying a gun, he is soon lost in the sea of uncertainty, not knowing what

make to get. He wades through catalogues, and advises with friends. The further he investigates the deeper he gets into the mire, and is almost tempted to give up in despair. What gun ought he to buy? A gun of any reputable manufacturer, for in these progressive times no one maker has discovered a golden secret that enables him to make the only good gun. Let the buyer select the make of any one of established reputation, and the gun will suit him. Competition is too strong to permit any maker to put on to the market a poorly constructed gun. There are, of course, peculiarities of manufacture of bolts, lugs, slides, and boring that may be especial virtues in one kind of gun, but no gun has them all to the exclusion of all others. But of established makers, their work is all good. The price to be paid depends on what the purchaser wishes to pay. But he can depend on one thing, that is, that an established gun maker will not sell him a poor arm at any price. There are three classes of gun-barrels used in the construction of guns. Damascus, laminated, and twist. Quoting from the *Rod and Gun*, these barrels are made as follows: "The Damascus barrel is formed by taking nearly equal proportions of refined iron and steel bars. These are placed in piles or 'fagoted,' and then heated and thoroughly welded together. The bar thus formed is cut into equal lengths, again fagoted, welded under a trip-hammer, drawn into narrow rods, and these are then twisted. To make the best Damascus barrel, three of these twisted rods are placed alongside of each other and forged into a ribbon of the dimensions of cross-section of one half inch by seven-sixteenths for the breech end of the barrel, and one-half by three-sixteenths of an inch for the muzzle

end. The ribbon is now wrapped around a mandrel, and its convolutions are firmly welded together at a white heat by hammering the ribbon on the mandrel while placed in a semi-cylindrical groove. Another portion is added to that just formed by jumping and hammering till the length of the barrel is completed.

"Laminated steel barrels are formed of ribbons composed of six parts of steel to four of iron, and the only difference between laminated steel and Damascus barrels is that the ribbons composing the former are made of rods less twisted; but the ribbons are subjected to more hammering when on the mandrel in order to get greater condensation and firmer welding of the fibres of the two metals."

The twist barrel is often called "stub-twist," from the stubs of horse-shoe nails out of which these barrels were first made. These stubs and other scraps are welded together, drawn into bars, then heated, and while one end is in a notch or clamp, the other end of the rod is attached to the axis of a crank and twisted. At present these rods are made of selected iron, the supply and quality of stub having fallen off. These twisted rods are now beaten into flat bars, and then wrapped around a mandrel, and their edges welded together. This forms the twist barrels. There is no perceptible difference between Damascus and laminated barrels, in practical use, although the Damascus are far handsomer in appearance. The laminated seem harder and require less care and attention in keeping clean.

Having decided what make of gun to buy, the material of the barrels and the bore, the purchaser is ready to select his gun. The length of the barrels, that is, the standard, is 30 and 32 inches. The extra length

making no difference in shooting qualities as between these two. As the 30 inch is more generally used, we will as an illustration accept one of that length. The weight depends on the physique of the party using the gun. For wild-fowl shooting 10 bore guns run in weight from 9 to 12 pounds. We will not be an extremist either way. Should we accept the lighter weight, the strong charge of powder necessary to use would make the recoil unpleasant. This we could partially do away with by making our charge of shot smaller. But we are inexperienced as yet, and must not do that, for we don't want to be handicapped on our load. Should we take the extreme weight, then our gun would be unpleasantly heavy and unfit for ordinary shooting. If you are of strong build, and capable of withstanding fatigue, choose a 10 or 10 1-2 lb. 10 bore, for you will bear in mind that so much of your shooting will be from blinds and boats that you can stand a heavy gun; besides, the heavier the gun the slighter the recoil.

If your business is such that your habits are sedentary, and have little opportunity for out-door enjoyment, choose a 9 1-2 or 9 3-4 lb. 10 bore, or an 8 3-4 or 9 lb. 12 bore. Please remember these guns we are now mentioning are for *wild fowl* shooting, not upland birds, and great shooting power must be obtained.

Select a gun that fits you, that is, one that comes up right. The length of one's arms and neck have much to do in this respect. At the same time, no rule given generally can be accepted as true, for long-armed men, at times, use short stocks, and short-armed men use the contrary. The only correct way is to experiment with guns until you find one that fits you, and take your measurement from that. The length of the stock, meas-

ured from the front trigger to the centre of the heel plate, ranges from 14 to 14 1-2 inches, the length usually selected being 14 1-4. The drop of the stock, measuring with a straight line from the full line of the rib to the butt, runs from 2 1-2 to 3 3-4 inches, 3 inches being the standard American, while the English use much straighter. Some stocks are made with a "cast off"; that is, the stock is made or bent a little to the right of the true line of the rib; this brings the right eye nearer the center of the rib, and enables one to catch a quicker aim. The drop of the stock depends to a very great extent on the position of the shooter. When one stands erect he will require a crooked stock, whereas if he stretches his feet far apart he will be surprised what a great difference it makes. Stand in an easy, graceful attitude, with the left leg advanced, the right but a short distance from it, just far enough to act as a brace. With a 10 gauge loaded with 4 1-2 dms. powder, the pressure of recoil is fully 40 lbs. against the shoulder, and unless you are prepared you will feel it. By all means choose an easy, graceful position, for the attitude you once assume will grow on and cling to you. Now that you have chosen an easy way of standing, it will not be considered as vanity on your part, but take your gun, stand before a looking-glass, and repeatedly sight at your right eye. If the gun fits you at the shoulder, and each time covers the eye aimed at, so you can see the entire line of the rib of the barrel, and the gun's sight pointed at the lower edge of the eye,—then you have a gun made for you. You will, of course, have to incline your head a little; this is essential to throw your eye-sight down the rib.

For wild fowl shooting do not get your stock too

crooked. You will naturally feel inclined to do this, because at stationary objects it will come up a little easier; but bear in mind that wild fowl will seldom be stationary or on a level with you; on the contrary, they will be at an elevation, and far from you. The tendency will then be to undershoot them, and experience will demonstrate that you will undershoot twenty times when you overshoot once.

The trigger pull should be from 4 1-2 to 5 lbs. Not less than those weights, because you are shooting with gloves most of the time, and the trigger must not pull too easy. Snap-shooting won't do on ducks in the long run, and don't attempt it. You will find the hunter who is a good judge of velocity, height, distance, and the resistance of the wind, the cool, calculating shot, is the one who is the expert in duck shooting.

The barrels should be heavy at the breech, and have an elegant taper from the breech to the muzzle.. The stock should be oiled, not varnished. As you are a beginner, have your right barrel modified choke, and the left full choke. A modified choke is a gun that will throw from 300 to 325 No. 8 shot in a 24 inch circle at 35 yards, and a full choke 350 to 400 under like conditions, the load being 1 1-4 oz.

If a mechanic is known by the tools he uses, a sportsman is equally known by the condition of his gun. Do not bother with the locks, they will care for themselves; but it is well to look at them occasionally, especially after having been out in a storm. If they then need attention, use only the finest watch oil. If some of your friends tell you they never clean their gun except when going to use it, accept the suggestion with thanks, but don't you try it unless you want to give

the gun the "lazy measles" caught from you. The barrels are of the finest steel; after being used they must be cared for, and any man who is too shiftless or indolent to clean his gun and properly care for it, doesn't deserve to have a fine one. No matter how tired I come in from a hunt, my guns are thoroughly cleaned that night; the result is that my two guns to-day are as bright inside as the day I received them. There is a secret in gun cleaning, simple, but never-failing, always at hand, and with it properly used no man's gun will disgrace him in its condition. That secret is watchfulness and "elbow grease." I have tried almost every known gun lubricator, and if the gun is properly cleaned most of these oils are excellent. In cleaning a gun use no water. Use a little kerosene or benzine on a rag. When it is necessary to remove powder that is baked, then use a single wire brush, a little kerosene on it, and plenty of elbow grease, until every particle of leading is removed. Wipe inside of barrels dry, oil well with vaseline, refined lard oil, pure sperm oil, or mercurial ointment, and 'tis done. I prefer vaseline, and use it exclusively. My guns, put away months ago, are as free from rust or corrosive matter as the day they were oiled.

Binocular shooting is the style indulged in at the present time by some of the most expert shots in America. That it is a successful manner of aiming, none can deny. The advocates of this way of shooting have certainly proven that what they claim for it is true,—that there is no more necessity for closing one eye in shooting with the shot-gun than there is in archery, base-ball, billiards or any other sport where it requires skill and judgment. Among the leading shots

of the United States who shoot binocularly (both eyes open) are Dr. Carver, Charles W. Budd and James R. Stice. There are many others who do it, but these gentlemen have proved themselves among the best in the land. It is a matter so easy of demonstration that any one can readily be satisfied whether or not that style of shooting is best for him. To try it, take your gun, point it at some immovable object, draw a steady and true aim, as you usually do with left eye shut; then without moving the gun open your eye and look at the sight. What do you see? That your aim with your eyes open is just the same as with one eye shut. Now try some other object. Bring your gun up deliberately, draw on the object selected, keeping both eyes open; then shut your left eye, all the time holding the gun still. What is the result? You find your aim just as true with both eyes open as with one, although you may have been shooting for years with one eye shut. But then did you notice the uncertain feeling you had as to whether or not your aim was true with both eyes open? You must have felt it, and you would wink and blink, first with left eye shut, then try both eyes open; still, you could not divest yourself of the feeling that your binocular sight was as true as the other manner of sighting. Then which is the better way? Neither; both are all that could be expected, and the kind used by any experienced shot is the way he will do best. The one who shoots with both eyes open thinks his the best method, because he has a double range of vision; while the advocates of the other side claim they can see enough with one eye. On ducks I can see no appreciable difference, and I shoot one way as well as the other.

And now we come to the most important thing to be learned in wild fowl shooting—the science of holding. There has been a vast amount of discussion during the past ten years on the subject, and the advocates of holding on and ahead still live, breathe, and are multiplying over the earth.

Whether or not it is best to hold six inches or as many feet ahead of cross-flying objects from the trap, will not be entered into here, our object being to learn all we can as to the best manner of shooting wild fowl.

There are, we might say, two different methods of aiming. First, as a snap-shot; second, as a deliberate shot. I give the definition of both in the language of Mr. T. S. Van Dyke, one of the best posted writers in the world.

He defines a *Snap Shot* to be, "when the gun is jerked to the shoulder the instant the game is seen, the eye catches a dim glimmering glimpse of the gun in the right position, and the shooter fires simultaneously with such glimpse, or else shifts the gun quickly into the right position, if it is pointed wrong, then catches another dim glimpse of its being right, and fires simultaneously.

"*A Deliberate Shot:* First, the cool, deliberate aim, which catches a full, clear view of the bird and barrels, and sees plainly that the barrels lie in the right direction, either on the game or at the proper distance ahead of it, but does not delay pulling the trigger an instant after the eye does see the gun is right. This is the aim of the successful duck-shooter, of the cool shot on prairie-chicken, and the great majority of shots generally on game in the open, where no special haste is necessary."

I do not believe any man who systematically shoots, one might truthfully say, instinctively, as a snap-shot, can ever make a thoroughly successful duck shooter. To be sure, there are places he will—jumping them from creeks, from rice, from willows, or shooting them over decoys; but when it comes to taking them as we find them, on cold blustering days, the wind howling and blowing the shot out of its course, where time, distance, speed and all the combinations are against him, I don't believe he can overcome such obstacles. No man can become proficient in duck-shooting unless he is a good judge of distance, comprehends the velocity the bird is flying, how high it is, the allowance that should be made for the wind and for the falling shot. The laws of gravitation must be considered and practical experiments show that shot drops 8.05 inches at 40, and 19.85 inches at 60 yards. Taking all these things into consideration, how a snap-shot can overcome them all, and the hunter bring his gun up, just in the right spot, to kill ducks regularly at 40 and 50 yards, is beyond my comprehension. Some of the prettiest and best shots I ever saw at the trap and in the field were snap-shots, but I have not as yet met them on a duck pass, when the wind was blowing a gale, and single ducks were flying 40 to 60 yards high, and fully 100 miles an hour.

The beginner should study distance, not only on the marsh at ducks, but at home in his daily walks, so that at from 30 to 60 and even 75 yards he can estimate space, to tell where two and four feet are from a given object, that he may know how to judge the flying ducks. Study their flight, that he may learn how to hold on them, always remembering they are farther than they

seem, and are moving fast. That it takes time to decide to shoot, to press the trigger, to ignite the powder, for the shot to reach the bird, the time is infinitesimal, and yet the bird moves swiftly all the while. Then hold well ahead, don't be afraid of getting too far, for your estimate of distance will almost invariably be less than it should be, and when you think you are holding four feet ahead of the bird, you will not be over two. On a duck you estimate at 40 yards, going at a moderate gate, say a mallard; let it come a little to your side and over, just as it gets near you coolly bring up your gun, draw it in behind, gauge the swinging of the gun by the speed of the bird; cover the bird, then advance ahead just as the bird is passing you; keep the gun moving, and when you think you are from two to three feet ahead, steadily pull the trigger, and you have centered the bird. Don't check the moving of the gun until you hear the report.

In other chapters of this book, full directions have been given how to aim at ducks in their different flights; but let the reader bear in mind that the greatest fault of every beginner and inexperienced duck-shot is to *shoot behind*. So, try to overcome this universal fault, and on cross or quartering ducks shoot from one to ten feet ahead, according to their distance from you, and the speed with which they are flying.

When ducks jump up and fly from you, they are constantly rising; your shot obeying the laws of gravitation will drop. These things must be taken into consideration, and you should aim well over the bird, from 5 to 20 inches.

Never fear your gun bursting by an excessive charge. Any good gun will safely stand the strain of three times

the load you will habitually shoot. Beware of getting foreign substances in the barrels, such as mud, snow and anything that will completely or partially clog them; they are the causes of many an "unaccountable" bursting of the barrels.

Practice, patience and perseverance are the lanes that lead to the roads of success in becoming an expert shot.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SHOT, POWDER, SHELLS, WADS AND LOADING.

In the selection of the size of shot for any given kind of game, the average hunter is very peculiar in his ideas; and this peculiarity is especially noticeable if one will pass a few hours in some village gun store, where hunters from that immediate vicinity congregate, and buy their ammunition. It seems strange, nevertheless 'tis true, that a beginner almost without exception starts out on his voyage of life (in a shooting sense) and uses too great a quantity, and too large size of shot. Notice the farmer boy, he who delights to stand on pin-oak ridges and bang away for hours without bagging a bird. When he buys his shot he abstractedly attacks the shot rack, runs his hands into the different compartments, allows the shot to ooze between his fingers, and in reply to the oft-repeated question, "What size will you have?" casts on his juvenile companion a comprehensive look and replies, "Guess we will take 1's as ducks are a little wild." He takes "1's," and the gunsmith's kindly suggestion to try 4's is entirely thrown away,—passed by without notice; or, if noticed, unheeded. The boy is not the only one afflicted with these strange notions, for the man hunter, the terror of the swamps,—he who through the laws of descent has become the absolute and unqualified owner of a muzzle loader,—he too uses coarse shot, 1's and 2's for ducks;

and should they fly extra high, he has no hesitancy in giving them a trial with BB's. Talk to him about 5's and 6's for ducks! Why, bless you, were we to do that his flaxen hair would stand on end, and his plebeian face emit sparks of disgust. Don't try to convert him; might as well try to convert an old toper to temperance, or preach morality to an acknowledged libertine. In either case, you will be casting pearls before swine. But some time, when you are loading your boat with ducks that you are knocking from all directions with 6's, 7's or 8's, watch this same ignoramus. You may not see him personally, but note the ducks where you know he is. They come steadily along, 100 or 125 yards high, instinct and experience having taught them they are beyond the scope of danger. Suddenly you see a flock tower quickly, then hear the boom of his gun. That's all, no damage done. He is having a heap of fun. *We* know he won't kill one during the day at that height. What is his excuse for not killing them? Poor powder, dirty gun, too small shot,—and excuses without end. But don't, my dear friend, intimate that it is the fault of the gun, unless you are willing to be talked to death, and buried right there, beneath an avalanche of encomiums and reminiscences of what this same gun accomplished in the hands of his grandfather. Then when some stray shot tips a bird, and the bird sails away for hundreds of yards, he will yell like a maniac to his partner to "Watch him! Watch him! I hit him, I hit him!" A few years ago I witnessed an entertainment of this kind, and I was the entire audience,—and I trust the sole survivor. During the day, two of them bagged one duck, while I killed over 40 mallards.

Large sized shot are but little used among experienced shots at the present day, and it is seldom indeed that any larger than 4's are used for ducks. For a great many years this was my favorite size; then I drifted into using 5's, but becoming so much in love with decoys, I allowed the current of experience to carry me still farther toward the haven of success, and there I am anchored, and have pinned my faith to No. 6. The reader must bear in mind, that the great improvement in the shooting powers of guns of the present day allows us to decrease the quantity of shot, thereby increasing the penetration, without sacrificing the pattern. It is therefore unnecessary to load with 1 1-2 and 1 1-4 oz. shot as we did in muzzle-loading days; and we find we obtain better results with 1 oz. and 1 1-8 in our choke bore guns. While the shooter may at times make extraordinary long shots with 3's and 4's, still, he wing tips so many that the delights of the hunt are in a measure lost at sight of the birds escaping crippled, only to perish in a lingering death. This will not happen so often with 6's and with them one can kill at any reasonable distance; while shooting over decoys they are all that could be desired. At such a time close or high shots are equally within reach.

Shot as manufactured at the present time is both soft and hard, or, as it is called, "soft" and "chilled."

For a number of years the impression was sown broadcast that chilled shot was injurious to gun barrels. Ever since its introduction I have shot it constantly both in the field and at the trap, using sizes from 10's to No. 2's and find nothing injurious about it. It is far preferable to soft; being hard, it retains its rotundity better, and as a matter of course, penetrates farther

than soft. It is a trifle lighter than soft shot, but this disadvantage is more than offset by the benefits obtained in using it.

The reader will find below a table of sizes used generally throughout the United States:

TATHAM & BROS., N. Y.			ST. LOUIS SHOT TOWER CO.		CHICAGO SHOT TOWER CO.		
Diam. in Inches.	Size.	Pellets to Ounce.	Size.	Pellets to Ounce.	Diam. in Inches.	Size.	Pellets to Ounce.
.23	FF	24	OOO	33	.23	OOOO	22
.22	F	27	OO	39	.22	OOO	27
.21	TT	31	O	46	.21	OO	33
.20	T	36	BBB	51	.20	O	38
.19	BBB	42	BB	60	.19	BBB	46
.18	BB	50	B	71	.18	BB	53
.17	B	59	1	90	.17	B	62
.16	1	71	2	100	.16	1	75
.15	2	86	3	118	.15	2	92
.14	3	106	4	159	.14	3	118
.13	4	132	5	237	.13	4	146
.12	5	168	6	299	.12	5	172
.11	6	218	7	385	.11	6	216
.10	7	291	8	509	.10	7	323
.9	8	399	9	700	.9	8	434
.8	9	568	10	1103	.8	9	596
.7	10	848			.7	10	854
.6	11	1346			.6	11	1414
.5	12	2326			.5	12	2400

As the beginner will oftentimes find birds other than those he starts out to hunt, it will perhaps aid him on his pleasant migrations, if he knows what sizes are best for the different species of birds he will so often find throughout the Middle and Western States.

For Geese..... Nos. 1, 2, 3 or 4.

" Swan..... " 1, 2, or 3.

" Mallards..... " 5, 6, 7 or 8 (the 8's over decoys in timber or rice.)

For Red heads.....	Nos.	6, 7.
" Canvas back.....	"	5, 6.
" Blue bills.....	"	6, 7.
" Pin-tails.....	"	5, 6, 4.
" Widgeon.....	"	6, 7.
" Teal.....	"	7, 8, 6.
" Prairie chicken.....	"	8, 7, 6, as season advances.
" Ruffled grouse.....	"	6, 7, 8.
" Snipe.....	"	10, 9, 8.

The sizes in numbers underlined are best to use. You will find your gun, like many human beings, eccentric, and you must get acquainted with it thoroughly and find out its peculiarities. Some guns will throw a certain size with great closeness; then another size will scatter over a vast space. You should target it at 40 yards, with the different sizes you think of using, and select the size that makes the most uniform target, with sufficient closeness to kill regularly at distance tested. Your gun may throw 5's better than 6's or 7's. If so, the reason is unexplainable, yet it will always remain true in fact, and you must cater to it by shooting that size.

POWDER.—The grade of powder used throughout the Western States is noted more for the price it can be bought for than for the particular brand used. A certain brand will be used in a given locality,—some one acknowledged to be an excellent shot will use it with splendid results, his friends use the same, and although not perfectly successful themselves, still, basing their conclusions on results attained by their friend,

who has proven the great strength and uniformity of the brand, the verdict is universal in that locality that this certain brand of powder is the best in use. Consequently, they all use it. And no matter what inducements are held out, it is hard to wean these people from the brand they have used so long. The price of powder has been gradually lowered until it seems that anyone who feels he can afford to hunt ought to be satisfied with the price he can now buy at. In this article I am not going to advocate the use of one brand to the exclusion of all others, for I do not recognize that any one powder company manufactures a brand that is superior in all respects to that made by any and all others. There are some redeeming qualities in every brand in existence. I have repeatedly tried different makes, until I believe my experiments and experiences have included every American brand. The American people, in fact, the inhabitants the world over, are a little gullible,—that is, they have a craving desire and constant anticipation for a change. This being the case, they hail with delight the advent of anything new, afraid something may, mushroom-like, spring into sudden popularity and they not be instrumental in introducing it to a certain extent. In this way they discard old and tried powder, for the newest out,—the most popular craze. I have always found black powder a very poor kind to experiment on, and that which was clean, strong and reliable in years gone by, I find does not lose its prestige when brought in contact with and tried against its younger rivals. In buying powder then, the experienced shot knows what he wants, and will use no other. The beginner should first ascertain what he is to use, and having once

started to use it, refrain from changing. For, although he may not believe it, there is such a great difference in brands, that when he has started to use, and does use a given brand for any length of time, he will see a difference in his shooting, and the change usually proves detrimental to good scores. The powder should be strong, clean and moist, leaving in the barrels, even if fired throughout the entire day, a soft residue, which is easily wiped out. But let the reader bear in mind that the atmosphere has the greatest influence on the powder on hot, dry days. The powder will cake in the barrels forming a crust that disgusts every hunter. On the contrary, on cool, moist days, the effect is seen just the contrary. As water is always in close proximity to the shooter while duck shooting it is a very simple matter to have clean barrels, which can be done by dipping the barrels into the water. Should the beginner notice red streaks or flaky substances in the muzzle of the gun, after it has been fired, pay no attention to it, it amounts to nothing, and is no indication of lack of strength or of impurity in its manufacture.

The sized grains of powder used in wild fowl shooting is generally FG. This is pretty coarse. FFG being finer, and FFFG still finer. The coarser the powder the slower it is and greater the penetration. Should one constantly shoot FG at ducks, then use the finer grades, he would speedily detect the difference,—as the finer would give greater recoil, and being quicker, less time allowance would be necessary. I am partial to FG, and use that size at ducks and at the trap; at the same time, I have seen very fine and extra coarse powder used with equally good effect. This being the case, we are led to the conclusion, that no particular

size is needed, but that one should not change sizes after becoming accustomed to one in particular.

Within the past few years, great prominence has been gained in the shooting world by the use of wood-powder. There are two kinds now being extensively used,—the "Schultze gun-powder," made in England, and the "American wood-powder," manufactured in this country. Both of these powders are expensive, and possibly out of reach of the average hunter so far as price is concerned. Both these grades have their champions. The claims put forth by both, are, one might say, identical. They claim superiority over black powder on the ground, "it is cleaner, stronger, gives a greater penetration, less recoil, and but a trifling amount of smoke."

SHELLS.—I am not an advocate of brass ones, and think they should only be used when the hunter is too poor to use paper shells. In my experience, there is not a single virtue they possess that cannot be found in paper shells. To say they outshoot paper ones is easily said, but a faithful trial of them under all circumstances has failed to convince me of it. If it is a question of economy, all right, use them; but, if you expect to be benefited by their use you will be disappointed. For years I used them at the trap, and after ducks, and the more I saw of them, the more disgusted I became. The shot was constantly shaking out, the wads becoming loose, until at times, I would have three to a dozen charges of shot shaken out and loose in my pocket. Then again, the jar of the first barrel would loosen the wad in the other, the shot would patter in the water or on the leaves, a duck would fly off, while

I was only prepared to fire powder and wad at it. There is such an infinite variety of shells made, and so reasonable in price, that it does seem that any one can find *some kind* of paper shells within his means. A good quality will stand re-loading anywhere from three to eight times, and as they can be crimped each time, they answer in place of brass shells for economy. In brass shells, wads should be used two sizes larger than the shell—that is, in No. 10 shells, No. 8 wads. Not to be behind the times, and to keep pace with the constant improvements being made, shell manufacturers are all the while trying to improve their make. The result is conical and round bases. The conical base performs a double function,—it increases the penetration, and the extra thickness, the strength of the shell. But any shell made by a reputable maker is safe enough. I am an ardent lover of water-proof shells for wild fowl shooting, and would not use any other as a gift. This reason is not a groundless one, but formed after a miserable day spent with ordinary shells in a drizzling rain,—shells sticking so that after each discharge of the gun the empty shell would have to be driven from the barrel with a wiping stick. Since that day, I have used nothing but water-proof shells, and now when I am out, and the elements punish me with rain or snow, the least of my troubles is the fear of shells sticking in my gun.

WADS.—I never saw a thorough hunter unless he has his own notions about wadding. There is but one secret in wadding, that is, plenty of wads on the powder, tight-fitting and well lubricated. Almost any gun will shoot better with wads on the powder one size larger than the bore. There may be occasional exceptions, but they are rare.

LOADING.—This is one of the most important things about using the shot-gun with success, and no matter how good a shot a man may be, if he is shooting shells poorly and improperly loaded the effect is immediately noticeable. Too much pains can scarcely be taken in loading shells. There is a load designed to bring out the greatest shooting powers of every gun. What that load is, can only be ascertained by practical experience; and when a man buys a new gun he should experiment until he has learned the load that gives the desired effect. The old adage, "more haste, less speed," is illustrated in loading shells. Perhaps the construction is not literal, and yet the gist is true, for the more haste in loading shells, the less good results are obtained. Let a hunter who knows he is an expert shot use shells either on wild fowl or at the trap that he doubts their effectiveness, and he cannot do himself justice, because, he does not feel absolutely sure of scoring the simplest shots. Then let him miss a few shots that he feels he should have made, and the day is spoiled for him; he either quits in disgust, or with grating teeth bangs away all day long, knowing he is bucking against an adverse fate. For a number of years I would not use any loaded shells other than those loaded by myself. I would not be so egotistical as to think others could not load them as well, and yet, when I loaded them myself, I had that confidence in the efficacy of the load, that when I missed a shot that ought to have been a hit, the shells were never blamed. There is a sense of satisfaction in this, that every experienced hunter knows and has felt. How often it happens that hunting in a boat with a companion, one who has proved himself an excellent shot, through

courtesy we offer him a few of our shells to try. He declines them on the ground "has plenty of his own." We rather insist, and not to be impolite he accepts them. At the same time, he only uses enough, that he may not offend us. Why? Simply because he has more faith in his own shells than in any other.

Does the reader intend loading his own shells? Taking it for granted he does, let us aid him all we can, that it may be properly done. First, in loading, say one shell at a time, the best loader in my opinion is the Barclay. This is made of metal, with flanges inside that guide the wads, and keep them from tearing down the edges of the shells. The receptacle for the shell to set in is of wood. The base of the shell setting into a cavity to hold it securely; where the cap comes there is a hole drilled sufficiently large that by no possible means can the edges of the cap touch the hard wood. This is a slow process, but accurate. The better way is to buy at some gun store a loading block that will load fifty shells at one time. Granting this to be done, let us together load fifty shells for duck-shooting. Placing the shell case on a solid foundation, perfectly level, we put the 10 ga. shells in. Our powder is in a dish or box large at the top so we can dip in handily. 4 1-2 dms. are put in each shell through a funnel; then we tap the box lightly with a wooden mallet, settling the powder and making all charges level. Next, we put in a 10 ga. card wad. The reason for doing this is that the wad is dry, containing no oil, besides, it is stiff, and holds the powder compactly. Now, the next wadding must be large, thick, and supplied with oil sufficient to slightly lubricate the barrels. There is a great diversity of opinion as to what kind of wads to use at this point in

loading. I have tried every wad in existence, and really can detect no difference; the only thing to be observed is, they must be tight-fitting lubricators, and what they lack in thickness should be made up in numbers. Don't let us use felt wads in this fifty, but common pink-edge. I suggest this to make simplicity in loading, although I am partial to felt wads, and use them entirely over powder. As we are going to use 1 1-8 oz. shot, our wadding must be sufficiently thick to just allow the shell to crimp nicely,—so we will put 2 pink-edge wads over the powder on top of the card we already have in. Here we will use No. 9 wads, because we want to confine the load, and see there is no possibility of gas escaping, besides, the more we confine the powder the more force we obtain. Now, on this we will put another card wad,—we could get along without it, but it helps fill up the shell and keep the thick wads firmly together. You noticed I put in each wad separately, and pressed them down with the hand loader or ramrod. Now we want the pressure even, and we will give each shell two or three light taps with our mallet, just enough to make it compact, but not to break the grain. Then the shot goes in with card wad on top. We should use a card wad because the resistance on the shot should be light, and a thin wad, just so it will hold the load firmly is better than a thick one. The shells are now ready for the crimper. We will use the old style, one that turns the edges in smoothly and roundly, being careful with each shell that the edges are crimped so they turn down and rest solidly against the wad. Too much pains can not be taken in crimping shells, especially for wild fowl shooting, for they receive at times rough usage, and must

not shake loose. No matter how well your shells may be loaded otherwise, if they are negligently crimped they will have lost their force and effect. I have been complete in this explanation of how to load, because it is the key that unlocks one of the doors of success in shooting.

So well recognized is the fact that uniformity of loading and its being properly done is essential to success, that machine-loaded shells are fast taking precedence over all others. I have used them for the past two years. No man can by hand load and obtain the same uniformity that these shells possess. While these same shells may not please us more than those of our own loading, yet we must admit they are equally as good, and when one has a family of inquisitive youngsters, his Christian duty demands his buying loaded ammunition, rather than endanger his little ones with powder unconfined around the house.

Schultze powder is intended to be loaded bulk for bulk, same as black powder, and the directions for loading it are, to "put the wads upon the powder *firmly* with the hand, and should not be rammed!"

American wood-powder requires great particularity in loading. The secret of success with it is, to have the powder thoroughly confined, requiring thick wadding and very great pressure. After being properly loaded, if one cuts open a loaded shell he finds the powder pressed together into a compact mass, that can almost be cut with a knife. The pressure put on this powder in loading runs from 75 to 100 pounds; on black powder about 40 pounds.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

OUTFITS, BLINDS, DECOYS AND DUCK-CALLS.

Now that the beginner has waded through the labyrinth of guns, and the most approved manner of using them to advantage, let us wander still farther up the scale of wild-fowl shooting, and clothe him in garments suitable for his avocation. His clothes must be devoid of conspicuity, but gotten for the express purpose of answering what they are intended for. A duck hunter dressed for the swamps is not in an artistic sense, a "thing of beauty"; on the contrary, he is not only devoid of personal charms, but there is a look of inferiority about him that his friends notice, and he is apt to appreciate. While this is true, he should shake off all feelings of pride, and be dressed properly for his destined place, that in the swamp and in the timber, style and fit are of no consequence; and that the sun will shine as warmly, the birds sing as merrily, the winds blow as gently, the rice stalks nod as cordially to him in his old, faded, ill-fitting suit as if he were dressed in the neatest clothes. Besides, he will be a great deal more comfortable, and having his war armor on, will occasionally slip and take a header in the mud with the utmost complacency. What kind of material his clothes are made of, depends on his own taste and the depth of his pocket-book. It

isn't necessary that he should buy a suit, the only requisite being, that it should be neutral in color and conform to his surroundings. Very dark or very light color should not be used; any strong contrast of shade is noticeable, and of consequence to be avoided. Wild fowl are much more apt to be alarmed at dark objects than light, and a black hat, sitting as it were on the top of the rice stalks, in some faded swamp, is frequently seen encasing the skull of one who ought to know better. It is difficult to imagine anything more conspicuous than a black hat in such a place. Let a hunter wear one, no matter how he is dressed otherwise, and he is plainly seen for a mile or more down the marsh; then let him move around, and the swinging of his head, the appearing and disappearing of that swarthy "kopf" is as complete an alarm to some incoming drake, as if a brass band were secreted there, and twelve Teutons should suddenly arise, point their horns at the drake, and toot, "See the conquering hero comes." Then don't wear a black hat. An old light gray suit of clothes, a slouch hat of faded gray, is about the thing. Have your coat pockets immense, that you may carry large quantities of shells and get at them handily. Canvas suits can be had from any gun store, and are the most serviceable; still, I prefer corduroy of drab grass color. This answers equally well, whether in marsh or timber. Always bear in mind to dress for warmth, for the season for duck shooting is usually one of inclement weather, and at times the thickest and warmest suits are insufficient to properly protect the wearer. Should the hunter get too warm, it is a very simple thing to discard one's coat, and place it in the boat, to be put on again as the day grows colder.

It is optional whether one wears a hat or cap, some preferring one, some the other. The advantage of a hat is that it protects the wearer better. The coat ought to be lined with heavy flannel, or, better still, with Mackinaw. It should be loose, fitting the wearer comfortably, and allowing him to put on extra clothing beneath it when desired. The sleeves ought to be easy at the arm pits, so as to allow perfect freedom of movement in shooting and rowing. I like the vest of corduroy, lined warmly, buttoning tight to the chin, and made with *sleeves*, so that in a boat, on cold days I can keep comfortable and use my arms without the slightest restraint. Have the vest made with large pockets, so if you want to hurriedly chase a cripple, or wander a slight distance from the boat, you will have shells always at hand.

The pants should be loose-fitting, lined with flannel, and buttoned on the outsides from the bottom to the knee; this makes them fold nicely in the boot-leg. Boots should always be one size larger than you ordinarily wear; then you can put on two pair of heavy woolen socks. Always carry an extra pair of socks, for a duck-shooter is full of ambition, and is liable to lack discretion at times, and get over his boot-tops. Wear a flannel shirt with a generous collar. Always have on heavy, closely-knit wristlets.

Your shell-box, if habitually hunting in a boat, ought to be one of your own making. It should be ample to carry three hundred shells, with apartments for those of different sizes. I take it for granted that you take sufficient along for the trip, and therefore speak of this box as only holding loaded shells. In it always have oil, cleaning-tools and wiping-stick; fix a place in it

for a hatchet, which should be inseparable with it, and whose edge should always be sharp. You will appreciate it every time you build a blind of willows, for with it the most perfect brush blind is the work of a few moments. My shell-box is made of wood, painted lead color, water-proofed, has leather handle on edge, is 16 1-2 inches long, 10 inches wide, and 6 1-2 inches deep. I always use it for a seat. Don't consider yourself properly accoutred unless you have a rubber coat. Get a good one, dead-grass color, tough. Depend on it, it will be a good investment, for it will last for years. The most pleasant morning may be only a deceitful prelude that will be followed by a stormy day.

You will find many recesses in your boat; any one of them will make an excellent receptacle for a coffee-pot,—not a great, ill-proportioned thing, but a little two or four-quart pail, which will afford you more genuine luxury than anything you ever carried with you. Consider one of these part of your outfit, and always have it with you in the boat.

Blinds.—The bump of secretiveness of the duck-shooter should be fully developed, and if extra large the better, for the surest road to success is the aptness that one shows to hide himself properly at any and all places, and to do it without changing the appearance of the place where he is hidden. He should be thoroughly secreted; still, in thus placing himself out of sight, he must always have uppermost in mind the thought of building his blind just sufficiently thick and high to afford him ample protection, without conspicuity. All beginners try to build a blind that will hide them, never thinking for a moment that while they are

concealed, the vast size, the extreme height, the careless construction of their blind prevents precisely what they have sought to accomplish. And while it conceals their form, attracts the ducks' attention by its dissimilarity to the scenery around it. The blind should not be too high, and by all means ought not to loom up plainly to view. The hunter must depend to a very great extent on the color of his clothes, and his faculty of keeping perfectly quiet and immovable.

Where ducks are found, nature has showered her blessings abundantly, and flags, rice, grass, brush, twigs, trees and cornstalks are generally found. The hunter, then, will avoid the placing of artificial blinds, made at home, and borrow from the marsh or other places material that serves to complete or shelter the edges of the water where he is shooting.

If in the marsh, he should watch the flight of birds, mark the spot where they are dropping in with regularity; let experience tell him whether or not he has found the place where he is confident of good shooting. He must judge the direction of the wind, locate himself on the windward shore, if ducks are alighting, because they always light against the wind. After he has arrived at this point, let him not judge hastily what he is to do, lest having acted unwisely and without forethought, he repent at leisure. At this time he sees before him an opening, disclosing a little pond, surrounded by flags or grass, rice or willow twigs, while dotting the surface here and there great brown mounds of decayed stalks and compressed earth show to him a muskrat village. The question with him is, what shall he do for a blind? For the sake of illustration: We find him without a boat. He must ascertain how near

he can get to the water, and with his knife cut close to the water's edge tall stalks of rice, twigs or willows, placing them around him to make a shield from the view of passing birds. Being without a boat he is laboring at great disadvantage, and standing in the slimy mud, which is soon chafed into the consistency of mortar, his patience and endurance are both thoroughly tested. Let us help the poor fellow out of his predicament, and draw from out the rushes our boat; place him in with us, and then secrete ourselves. We instantly see the foundation or an essential part of it; in this swamp are muskrat houses and flags. We scoop the top off one of the largest houses, scatter it over bow and sides, completely covering the exposed sides of the boat. Near us tall rice stalks are waving, as if asking us to come in where they are; we accept the invitation, and go in by a circuitous route. Why? So as not to show the opening from the direction where birds are expected to come from. After we have gotten in pretty well, with our hunting knife we cut an armful of flags, shove the boat into the place started for, bend rushes over toward us, thus shielding the boat, or stick the oar blades into the mud athwart the bow, and intertwine rushes so as to make plenty of covering. Then, perhaps, after having excellent sport here for hours, we determine to change our base and go to some willow flash. This we do, the boat is in the thick willows; our handy hatchet is used with destructive effect, and we peep through and notice daylight struggling through an almost impenetrable blind. We must not have it too high, for nothing must interfere with our aim,—just sufficiently high that we can, in sitting comfortably straight, look over the top, and when we fire have an

unobstructed view. Nothing more quickly disconcerts a hunter than to have his barrels knock against twigs when about to shoot. When your blind is built in timber, carefully avoid shooting through limbs and twigs; it seems impossible to shoot through them with effect. A simple and excellent blind, easily constructed and always handy and serviceable in marsh shooting, is made by taking two large coffee sacks, sew the ends together, then begin about one inch from the top, and with yellowish brown braid, say about 1-2 inch wide, form loops from one end of the sack to the other, about an inch apart, the loops being 1-2 inch in space; then drop down say a foot from these loops, and make duplicate ones; these make sockets in which flags or grass can be stuck. About three feet apart run through short strong twine tied to the sack, leaving about four inches of string. Cut sticks, or take them with you in your boat, shove them into the mud, tie the sack to them, insert flags so they extend about six inches over the top, and you will have one of the most convenient blinds ever made.

When cover is light they are of great value and a perfect shield. I recall one day when far from shore, sitting on a muskrat house, screened by one of these blinds. I had most excellent shooting for hours.

While blinds are a necessity, let the beginners never forget that it is *motion* that frightens ducks more than anything. Always bear in mind ducks are high in the air, are on the alert. Your blind, your clothes are exactly like the swamp, but move, and the ducks will almost invariably see you, and, being alarmed, sheer off. When they are at a distance arrange yourself. Keep calm, be cool, don't move until they come to a point

where you feel they will give you the best opportunity to shoot.

DECOYS—The reader has noticed the partiality I have shown in this book toward decoys. In doing so I have no apology to offer, for it has been my constant aim and desire to disclose to you the secrets of the art of hunting wild fowl successfully, as constant practice, unlimited opportunities, and over twenty years' experience has demonstrated to me; and I can confidently say there is no other one thing that goes so far toward making an expert duck shooter, as a full knowledge and the proper use of decoys. When a boy, like all thoughtless urchins, my success in duck-shooting depended on luck. Decoys at that time seemed like harmless blocks of wood, created for the purpose of exercising my patience, when they became tangled together (which it seemed to me they always did). Then to think of picking them out of the ice cold water. Ugh! This thought alone was sufficient to drive cold chills down my back, and I studiously avoided their use. As later years added experience to my hunting education, the follies and errors of my youth (in this respect) were fully apparent, and I have tried to remedy them; and now I never go duck-shooting without decoys, and every expert in wild fowl shooting will bear me out when I say they are one of the absolute necessities of a hunting outfit. Of course, at times, they are in the way, and inconvenient,—an acknowledged nuisance; but for all this trouble the fruits of our labor are received when we see the decoys floating idly in the still water, so quiet, so inactive, with mallards, pintails, red-heads, and all the shoal water ducks quacking out greetings to them, and with lightning swish drop-

ping right in among them. Then always have decoys along with you, if you contemplate shooting over water. Bear in mind this, that you cannot have too many, the more the better, for the larger the flock the greater the attraction to passing birds. Of course, there is a limit to the number one can carry with convenience in his boat; and let your means of conveyance be the guide in directing you how many to take along. The best way to carry them is in a large coffee sack, with puckered string at the top. Have two,—in one from 12 to 18 mallards, in the other about 10 or 12 red-heads and 12 to 18 blue-bills. This will give a variety that will do for all kinds of ducks. Naturally, they decoy better to those of their own sort, but the kinds enumerated above answer all purposes and do away with the impossibility of having along decoys for each species one is apt to find.

Mallards are the ducks found in greatest number throughout the Western and Middle States, and while most other ducks will decoy to them, they will very seldom decoy with reliability to other species. They are peculiar in this respect, and like to rest and feed apart from others. To be sure, they will often be seen with others, but if a careful investigation is made it will be found that these have come where they are. Yet this is not always the case, for being at times possessed with neighborly inclinations, they occasionally visit their neighbors, the widgeon, pin-tail,—indeed, all other kinds. Following are decoys that answer for other than the birds they represent:

Mallards, for red-heads, pin-tails, gray duck and shovellers

Red-heads, for canvas-backs and blue-bills.

Blue-bills, for red-heads and canvas-backs.

Thus the reader will notice that mallard decoys do for nearly every kind, while a sprinkling of blue-bills and red-heads make the kind required complete. The way to set them out has been fully shown in preceding articles.

It is a very simple thing to make wooden decoys, and any one with moderate ingenuity can do so. Should the beginner wish to make them rather than to buy, let him select white pine or cedar. Take a piece of 2x6, and having a good decoy for a model, fashion it as nearly as possible to the original. The head and neck should be of one piece and fastened securely to the body. Fast oil colors are to be used, so that they will retain their colors. On the bottom drive in a staple and ring to fasten the cord, and put a long lead weight full length of bottom. This acts as ballast, and the decoys always retain their upright position, even when thrown into the water. If you buy decoys and they do not have this ballast on, put it on yourself; it will pay for the labor. I knew a friend to go blue-bill shooting with decoys devoid of this ballast, and he had to give up using the decoys because they kept tipping over. They were the ordinary cheap wooden ones—sold cheap. They were blue-bills and red-heads—that is what he bought them for. The blue-bills had several marks showing what they were intended for. But the red-heads! Oh, my! they would have as readily passed for mallards. I looked them over, and to the best of my knowledge they were wooden hybrids. They were such as I once saw in a wholesale store. I saw two different lots; one could buy from these two boxes whichever he desired, red-heads or mallards. They looked like neither, but were

branded both. Now, don't buy decoys simply because they are cheap, mallards especially; others don't make so much difference, for red-heads and blue-bills will at times come to anything—chunks of wood, sticks or any object that has the slightest similarity to themselves. My decoys are the best I could buy—perfect in shape, faultlessly painted, and artistic and real in every way. They will last me a life-time, because they are cared for. You hunt for recreation; you do this even if adverse winds have blown you into some harbor where necessity demands that it be done for the support of you and yours. Still, you find in it a pleasure, in spite of your reverses. If this is your lot, my sportsman heart wells out to you, for some of my truest friends are market hunters, whom the fates have dealt unkindly with. Then, trying as you do, to get the greatest possible pleasure out of it, my word for it, natural and life-like decoys will aid you materially, not only in being pleasant to the eye, but in being the means of swelling your total shot during any day.

The skill and inventive powers of man are constantly brought into action to discover devices to make more successful the pursuit of wild fowl. In this way we hear of rubber decoys, folding decoys, reversible decoys, decoy frames, profile decoys, etc., almost without limit. Let the young hunter ponder well before he invests in decoys, and feel that he is getting just what he requires in localities where he knows he will hunt.

Tame ducks make splendid decoys, as they are constantly on the move, thus attracting attention; besides, are at all times loudly quacking. Especially is this the case when the birds are passing over. Their movements in the water, their similarity to their wild

cousins, their solicitous calling is too much, and they are the means of bringing to death many and many an old duck whose age of discretion has long since passed.

Of decoys for wild geese, with the exception of the live birds, the only kind I have yet seen to my liking are the "profile" described in this volume on "Wild Goose Shooting."

Duck-Calls: The power of mimicry in man has full scope for vent in wild-fowl shooting. Some men are natural mimics, others are sadly deficient in such powers, and for the latter the artificial duck's quack is a blessing—that is, if it is properly used. But when we take into consideration the great army of duck-hunters and think for a moment how little they know the art of calling, we are at a loss to know the reason why. The majority of hunters invest in a duck call. They gaze upon it with admiration, squint into its muzzle of bell-shaped horn, look cautiously around to see if they are observed, then place it in their mouth, fill their lungs with air, give a violent blow, and the air resounds with a discordant "bla-a-a." Not to be discouraged at the first attempt, they try again, and by thrusting the extreme end against the palate a sound is blown out in A Minor, which faintly resembles a wild duck. A little practice soon obviates this, and the aspirant soon learns to imitate a duck. Imitate how? As the bird calls in its different moods? No, he doesn't think of that, the very thing he ought to think of. The result is, he seeks at times to call them to his decoys, and tries this, when he cries to them in tones which *they* utter only when in fright. The beginner should be a student of nature and birds, and watch them in their feeding grounds. Once in a while, some

corpulent matron will forget herself and call out "quack, quack, quack" in "Won't go home till morning" strains; but the majority are quiet, feeding along with a "sip-sip-sip," just as you have often seen tame ducks do. Learn to imitate these; learn to imitate the whistling pin-tail, the widgeon, the "meow", the purring sound of the red-heads, the tenor quack of the shoveller, the soprano of the teal. Listen to the mallard hen, as she calls her mate. Try to call like her. See! through the forest trees he hears her cry and goes to her. How your blood tingles, as his grating, vibrating call reaches you, so mellow, so tender as it travels through the woods—"M-amph, M-amph." Practice this call, not on the wooden one, but with the one nature provided you with.

The best artificial calls I have seen are those made by Fred A. Allen. If one is apt he can readily learn to blow them, but bear in mind, the secret of duck calling is the right call in the right place, as the birds call in their different flights and resorts.

My opinion of "goose calls," basing a verdict on those I have seen, may be found in the Chapter on "Canada Goose Shooting."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

DOGS, AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS.

CANINE character is mostly the result of education. While it may be in part inherited, yet, let the blue blood become estranged from, or deprived of, refining influences, and his life is barren of good actions. Instead of becoming what he might if properly raised, he seeks the companionship of the lowest of his race, and degenerates into a sheep-stealer, a scavenger of the alley, one who sleeps by day, and whose nocturnal wanderings are conducive of no good. While excellent traits of character may have been inherited by him, it requires the most careful attention to develop them, and to bring them out of their crude state; for the natural disposition of the dog will assert itself, and human kindness, ingenuity and force, are the only means that will disclose what there is in him, and educate him properly. This being the case, the man must be the teacher, and the dog becomes what is made of him. What that may be, depends on the character, temper and patience of the man. Dogs are like children; in their young minds they receive early impressions. If those impressions are for good, they are the guide which directs their after life, and as months are added to their young lives, and they receive from their master kindness, patience and generous forgiveness of their childish pranks, the mild overlooking of their

little puppyish tricks, they soon learn to know that master as their friend ; they try to please him, to learn, perhaps not because they care for the knowledge themselves, but their little heads soon are wise enough to see that when they do as their master wishes, they please him, his pleasure is shown them, in divers ways, by fond petting, little delicacies to eat, and kind and affectionate words. These attentions soon wean him from his playmates,—he longs to please his master; perhaps he may feel sometimes his master is a little too particular with him, or he is too severe, when he insists on his learning his lessons when other dogs are loafing in the streets; possibly, when his chum, the neighbor's dog, has treed a cat and barks loudly for him to come and help keep her there, yet, he has learned to love his master; kind words and loving caresses have won his heart. He looks on the man as his companion, his protector, his friend, and in his heart, although he is but a dog, the seeds of kindness have been sown, have sprouted, ripened and developed into everlasting love and gratitude. In the selection of a dog for wild fowl shooting the purchaser should take into consideration the places and seasons of the year the dog is to be used. This sport is full of hardships for the dog, and it is but seldom that he can be used, except when the water is of icy coldness, or the wind equally cold and penetrating, when it comes in contact with his shivering frame. A dog for this kind of sport should be one peculiarly fitted for it. His coat should be thick, oily, and liver or sedge color ; as so much of his life is to be passed in the marsh, floundering in the mud, struggling through the tangled rice, or in the swollen stream, swimming against the rushing current, he

should be of compact build, and exceedingly strong and courageous. To use a pointer during the cold season is cruel, for nature did not intend him for this work; his place is in the stubble-field in the summer's sun. To use a setter at such times, is to test his courage and endurance. They will do the work, and will stand hour after hour retrieving without flinching, and no dog can do the work quicker or better.

But my idea of a duck dog is either a Chesapeake retriever, or an Irish water-spaniel. They are made for cold water, and take to it as naturally as a duck. Either breed are excellent and natural retrievers. But it requires education to make them perfect. Their color is liver or runs from a light to a dark-brown. They are unlike in looks, and the diversity of tastes in individuals ought to be satisfied here. The Chesapeake is smooth in coat, at times a trifle wavy; the hair thick, close, but oily, similar to an otter. The Irish water-spaniel is covered with kinky curls, a bushy top-knot on his head, and rather a rat tail. Of the two I decidedly prefer the Chesapeake. When one buys a duck dog untrained, no matter what his pedigree is, he must not expect too much of him. Buy one trained, or take one in puppyhood and bring him up as he should be, and he will be an ornament to his race. The peculiar traits are merely inherited; they must be developed and controlled by the human mind, and unless you are a monument of patience, don't attempt to train one. In the Western States, the dog used mostly for duck-shooting, is a cross between a spaniel and setter, the object being to combine the love for water found in the spaniel, and the speed and scenting powers of the setter. When one of these dogs is trained, there is no dog on

earth that will do his work better. In using the word "trained," I do not mean that when water is warm, and the elements combined make it a pleasure for a dog to retrieve—that he is then to be relied on; but I mean a dog who implicitly relies on the judgment of his teacher, allows no doubts to enter his mind, but is controlled entirely by the voice or hand of his master, whether he breasts a torrent of floating *debris*, or breaks ice to bring a bird, but goes and does his work because he is commanded to. In the selection of a dog, great stress should be laid on color, and the aim should be to pick out one wholly devoid of conspicuous markings. Black and white are the two colors that show up most plainly in the wild rice or grass, and unless the covering is especially thick, dogs of such colors are bound to be seen. As the color has nothing to do with the tractableness of a dog, there is no good reason for selecting one either with black or white markings, for these colors will be noticed by passing ducks, and the hunter should pick out one of dull, dead colors, trying as nearly as possible to get one the color of the faded swamp.

The best dog for all round shooting I ever saw was one raised and owned by Mr. Chas. Tate, of Low Moor, Iowa. In appearance, he was a spaniel, liver color, cross breed, his father a setter, his mother a spaniel. He was a stocky, square-built fellow, had unlimited endurance, while his speed, and the delicacy of his scent, were unapproachable. What "Colonel" did not know about hunting, I have never discovered in any other dog. His looks did not show it, for I knew men who never saw him in the field, offer to wager he would not point a bird. This conclusion they arrived at, wholly from his appearance, for his looks certainly did belie

him. One time when I had him in Western Iowa, Mr. W. H. Phelps, one of the finest shots in the State, saw him and came near hurting himself laughing when he found out I was going after quail with this dog. On this same hunt W. B. Wilcox, since deceased, was my partner for a day. In the party there were two blue-blood setters, and as they were pets and beautiful animals they received unremitting attention from their owners. Sometimes I thought Colonel was a little bit jealous, for any advances these dogs made toward opening up a friendship with him were instantly rejected with a sullen growl. He lay on the floor of the baggage-car, rolled up in a heap; his rough coat was homespun, compared with theirs of silken texture, and he seemed to know it. At times he would slowly rise to his feet, come to me, put his cold nose in my hand, and look me straight in the eyes, his great brown ones honestly seeking the truth from me, as if asking whether I, too, was going to desert him for these false gods. Honest old boy! He ought to have known me better. My tender stroking of his broad forehead, the affectionate patting of his stout shoulders, the reassuring smile I gave him seemed to soothe his troubled mind, and he lay down again, apparently happy, casting on his canine companions a look of contempt, and showing them his gleaming teeth.

In the fields of Western Iowa there was Waterloo that day, and Colonel was a Wellington. I never will forget the expression on Wilcox's face when reaching a likely field, he tried to make Colonel "hie on." Before this, I had motioned Colonel to heel. He recognized me as his master, and obeyed no other command. Wilcox got excited, condemned me for bring-

ing a "cur" into the field, slandering the poor dog, until I feared Wilcox would leave me disgusted. Colonel had been walking behind us coolly and silently; the other dogs were chasing one another without method, without system. I turned to Colonel and casting on him one of the friendly smiles I always take with me for a dog I like, motioned him to "hie on." He shot forward like a rocket, and through stubble, brush and briar, over the hillsides, across the creek, and through the stubble, he who was despised in the car now led the van. And then, when the birds were found, he stood as if carved of stone, until we were near and ordered him on. Then when we shot the first bird, how tenderly he brought it in. Poor crippled bird, its broken wing hanging down so limp, and its love of freedom still exerted in trying to escape from those firm jaws; how it beat its well wing against his black nose; then when Colonel neared us, with the struggling bird in his mouth, he turned quickly and pointed another quail in the grass, right at Wilcox's feet. One hundred dollars was offered and refused for a "cur" that day, and the life-blood trickled faster and warmer in two hearts, when Colonel brought me the quail, his face beaming with satisfaction, while I read his thoughts in his eyes, and I felt *sure* he did mine. Well, well! Colonel, if we secretly rejoiced that day we had reason to.

As a duck retriever he was perfection,—all the good qualities of one he possessed. He was alive to every interest of his master, would mark the different spots where the birds fell, and his keen eyes were never late in spying a flock, as they started to come in. He needed no urging to do his work, and in sunshine or rain,

blinding snow or floating ice, he never questioned his going, but went and returned at the will of his master.

In snipe shooting he would point the birds, or at heel simply retrieve. His wish was simply the desire of his master. He seemed to know the birds always arose up-wind, and he would approach noiselessly or with a loud racket, whichever way he thought would afford the best shot to the hunter. I have time and again seen him point snipe coming down-wind, then make a wide circuit and come up-wind, with loud splashing, to drive the bird toward the hunter.

He showed his greatest skill in prairie chicken shooting, and he was the only dog I ever saw that would work successfully on them in a November and December corn-field. There isn't a bird that flies that is harder to approach than an old chicken that has survived the fall battles. His experience has made him a veteran. He solicits no pension, for he feels perfectly capable of taking care of himself. On these old warriors Colonel has given his owner, Mr. Tate, and myself many pleasant afternoons. In the corn-field the dog would trot along through the standing corn, careful not to step on reclining stalks, or make the slightest noise; finally he would strike a trail, then the utmost caution would be exercised. As the trail grew fresher, he would creep silently along half crawling; then stop and look around at us, as if invoking caution. When he felt he had located the birds, he would slowly return to us, then go back of us; we knew what to expect. He had found where the birds were, and they had quit running and were hiding. Then we would separate—Mr. Tate and I. In a short time there would be a racket in that field, as if made by a steer running wildly,—it

was Colonel with the chickens between him and ourselves, and he was running against the stalks. He knew the birds would fly away from that noise, and so they would, presenting to us quartering shots.

There was something truly wonderful about that dog. It wasn't instinct, it wasn't inherited qualities, but it seemed like human wisdom transferred to the brain of an animal. I have never seen another like him, in his knowledge of the habits and peculiarities of birds. One time Mr. Tate and myself bagged 76 quails and 128 mallards in two and one half days with him.

"Bring up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." This applies equally well to dogs, and one cannot commence their training at too early an age. There can be no great love without confidence and respect. See to it, then, that when you start out to educate a puppy, that the first thing you do is to gain its confidence. When in its puppyhood it fondly licks the hand that pets it, you see that you are on the first step that will lead you into the recesses of its heart. The road is open and clear to you for the present; the ruts and obstructions will show themselves afterwards. Make a good deal of the puppy, let your actions toward it be only those coming spontaneously, ever showing that you are to be this animal's friend. "Kind words never die, they are cherished and blessed." So they will be with this puppy; and when once you have won his heart, nothing but death will separate you and it, nothing can take it from you. During the first few months of its life one cannot expect to do much, for this living, breathing animal is but a chunk of romping innocence. But now is the time to win its affections. Romp with it, pet it. Choice bits

from your hands, garnished with kind words soon make your pupil long for you, to run and meet you, to whine sorrowfully when he hears your voice and cannot bound to greet you. If you do not love the dog, do not try to train him, for you will either be unsuccessful or cruel. There can be no conception of the vast amount of labor connected with it, this bringing up a dog, trying to develop the unknown quantity of brain he possesses. Some dogs are morose, sullen, dull or deceitful. Should yours be of this kind better disown it and try again.

There are two things essential to your success in breaking a puppy. They are patience and firmness. Never attempt to train one without having a surplus of both on hand. In the early stages of puppyhood your little friend will test the first thoroughly, for he must have it engrafted into his head that there are things he must learn ; you will find him exceedingly forgetful. This is especially so, because he thinks his object in the world is to play, and the many good lessons you have so often taught him, that you feel he should know and does know, he seems to have forgotten. Then you are disgusted to find him looking at you, his face a perfect blank, as if this is the first time he ever heard of such a thing. You speak to him kindly, he lays down on his back ; his feet drawn up, and he looks at you. You speak to him firmly, he merely draws his feet closer, and sticks his tail between his legs, resting it on his stomach for you to admire, then sticks out his tongue, licks his chops, and looks at you with a sickly grin. All this time you feel it is getting most dreadfully warm ; the perspiration starts. Uncork that bottle of patience and take a good dose ; now is the time you

need it. After the puppy once understands what you want, *never* tell him to do it and allow it to go undone. No matter what the circumstances are, insist that it be done, and see that it is. If you don't, you will find the puppy will remember this laxity of yours, and expect it, and you will give in again. Do this a few times and your influence is lost.

You should have the puppy so situated that you can enforce obedience. Naturally he will want to run away, if things don't go to suit him. You must watch out for this and train him in an enclosure, a room or a small yard, where he is constantly within your power. As a puppy is willing to work, like a boy if he thinks it's play his lessons should be of that nature. He likes to play with any soft substance. This being the case, begin his lessons with an old glove. Tap him on the nose with it. As a matter of self-protection he will grab for it. Soon he will reach for it a little; then drop it at his feet, saying "Pick it up." He will soon learn to associate the words "pick it up" with your wishes. Always use the same words when teaching him some particular thing. After he has gotten so he will pick it up, tap him lightly with the glove, getting him excited a little, then toss it from you; not far at first, just so you feel he will get it. Don't let the lessons be too long, for he will construe them into the fact that it isn't play after all, and will want to quit. Don't tire him, or expect too much at one time, for while he may be slow at first, if you are patient and go at it systematically you will be surprised how easily he picks up things as he grows older. After the pup has gotten to understand your orders of picking up, and bringing the glove to you from short distances, throw it

farther; throw it over the house or some building; hide it, he will soon obey your every command. Enforce obedience at all times. Do not correct him in anger, nor whip him unnecessarily; but when necessity demands it, have no hesitancy in punishing him for faults or omissions he has committed or omitted. In teaching the puppy to lie down, the expression generally used is, "Down, charge." The word, "Down" is better, because it conveys the command to the dog without unnecessary words. The fewer words one uses the better. Teach the dog to associate words with actions in this way. Tell him to "down," at the same time pressing him down with your hand. He soon learns that when he is told to "down," if he doesn't mind, your hand will force him. Connecting the command with the raising of your hand, he soon learns to drop at sight of the uplifted hand, as readily as at the word. Practice and discipline are what makes him perfect in this respect. When you are ready to teach him to retrieve from water, don't throw him in the first time you happen to have him near it. Don't throw him in at all, for you will frighten him and delay his learning. But select some bright day, some place where the water is shallow and warm, and go down with him to its edge. When the atmosphere offers strong inducements for him to take a bath, throw sticks on the verge of the stream, where he can wade; gradually extend the distance, and in a few days he will bring from the water as well as from land.

When the dog retrieves, insist that the object brought shall be delivered into your hand, don't let him drop it at your feet or any other place. Don't let him jump up on you, but teach him to come to you with the duck in his mouth, to sit on his haunches and hold the bird

until you are ready to receive it. A perfect retriever is a delight to the hunter, and an ill-trained one a curse. After the dog has learned to bring the glove to your satisfaction, tie some stiff feathers around it. It then has the appearance of a bird, and smooths the way to his retrieving ducks. As young dogs are of a wandering disposition and like to stray from home, the nicest way to break them of the habit is to contract with some small boys that when they catch him from home, they will coax him to them and thrash him soundly, at the final whack telling him in fierce language to "Go home!" A few whippings of this kind inclines the puppy to think that he will get punished everywhere but home, and teaches him to avoid small boys. When the dog has arrived at the age of ten or twelve months he is like a boy in his teens,—he thinks he knows it all, and you will find that you must have a day of settlement with him; for some time, with sullen mien, he will attempt to disobey you, and instead of complying with your orders, will show his teeth as an indication of the manner in which he is prepared to care for himself. Watch out for him, and don't give him the slightest advantage, but seize him by the collar and whip him until he is thoroughly convinced that you are the master, not he. I never had a dog that I didn't go through the same siege with, and the best trained retriever I ever saw, my Don, I had the hardest fight with. He turned on me, a perfect fiend. We had it rough and tumble, and when we were through he was subdued, and until the day of his death he never received another blow from me,—it wasn't necessary. His intelligence was human; my orders to him were not commands, simply frank expressions of my wishes.

And to him I only had to say, "Don, please do this," "Don't make so much noise," "I wish you would go down after the mail," "Get your basket and go to the meat-market," "Please open, or shut the door," and the many tricks I taught him. And when I made these requests an almost human look would spring into his face, and as quick as they could be these things were done. How that dog loved me! I took him in his infancy, his puppyhood. At that time he was but a little roll of curly innocence. I was patient with him; overlooked his childish faults; taught him I was his friend; from the hand of my wife and myself he received his food,—the embryonic seeds of kindness which we sowed early, budded in his heart and blossomed into a love that only his death severed. Severed? Not with us, simply with him; for in our hearts no other dog can take his place. Others may come and go, but none can touch the tendrils of two responsive hearts as did Don. It is twelve years since he died, but the passing years do not lessen our love for him, but increases it; over our hall door his portrait in oil hangs, and greets us every day with that same sweet, mild look he always had for us when alive. And if, at this late day, my wife and I talk of Don, and the intelligence he possessed, how he guarded her and the children, how, when once I asked him to go with her one stormy night, he went and would allow no one to come near her; how when she moved he was always at her side; and when she stepped out to sing he terrified the audience with his angry growl when some persons tried to restrain him; and then, while she sang, he obeyed the wish of his master and lay at his mistress' feet and guarded and protected her, and then saw her safely

home. How, when he had a rival for our affections in the advent of our first-born, no jealousy entered his noble heart, but he followed that child and loved him, because he knew he was the idol of those he loved so well. Is it strange, then, that when these things are mentioned in our family circle, that an affectionate and tender-hearted wife and mother should feel her heart swelling and the tear-drops come down her cheeks? while I would get my paper turned upside down, looking for what I could not tell. The depth of love Don had for us could only be measured by his life; for his life was devoted to us, and no child ever craved knowledge as he did. He did not forget what he once understood, but his constant desire was to learn something new. It was not necessary to give him long lessons; merely show him once, and he never forgot his teachings. When we think of his death, how he was in the prime of life, how we loved him, and then stumble over some worthless cur in the streets, we cannot help but feel that with dogs, as with human beings, death loves a shining mark. We buried him on the hillside, like a warrior, his valuables deposited in the grave with him. Every morning when the sun rises from his couch, he sheds his rays and warms the earth that encloses Don's remains; then reflects back his light on the bosom of the Mississippi,—the stream on which Don and I passed so many happy hours together. The silent trees stand sentinels over his grave, and the summer winds play æolin music through their tops, and sing sad requiems for the departed dead. He was only a dog, and yet he was my Pythias, and would have died for me. There stands no monument to mark his grave,

but while *two* human beings live, his memory will be ever green to them.

When once a man has raised and educated a dog, ever showing to him unremitting kindness, there is no human friendship that will stand the test against this canine friend. The winds of adversity may blow harshly against him; those whom he once called friends may have deserted him; sudden prosperity may have weaned from him those whom he most trusted; Gonerils and Regans may have been raised beneath his roof,—but his four-footed friend will never forsake him, and whether he be clothed in finest raiment, or wander over the earth friendless, poverty-stricken, sick at heart and bruised in body, this friend will remain steadfast to him, die in his defense; or, when the end has come, will make his bed at his master's grave, and refuse food and shelter, through day and night, storms and sleet, watching his master's grave until nature has exhausted his vitality; then, starved to death, with choked and smothered breathing, he gladly dies at the grave of his only friend.

"And he was faithful to a corpse,
And kept the birds and beasts
Which hungered there, at bay."

The love for the dog has been inherent in man for generations, and the tribute paid to a dog 2,700 years ago ranks equally in pathos and beauty with anything written of him in modern times. Homer in his *Odyssey* speaks of Ulysses after an absence of twenty years as being recognized by his old deerhound:

"He knew his lord; he knew and strove to meet;
In vain he strove to crawl, and kiss his feet;
Yet all he could, his tail, his ears, his eyes,
Salute his master, and confess his joys."

Here, after a score of years had elapsed, the faithful hound was true to his master, his friend, his companion of early days. In the revolution of time he had not been carried away, but lived to greet his master. His strength was gone, his eyes fast growing dim; he could not bound to meet him, as in days of yore; but the love-light still shone in his eyes, and he longed to crawl and lick the feet of his long-absent friend.

The constancy and affection of the dog has been a theme of inspiration to Bulwer, Scott, Byron and others. The noble hound Roswal, the companion of Sir Kenneth, is thus eloquently spoken of:

"As he bore to the earth Conrad, Marquis of Monserrat, traitor to Cœur de Leon, the noble, faithful Roswal had not forgotten that night upon the mound beneath the standard of England; neither had he forgotten the traitor who, in the darkness, while a cloud shut out the tell-tale light of the moon, bore away the ensign, and left him weltering in his blood; he remembered all this when called upon to protect his master's honor, as well as to serve his king, and using the intelligence given him by the same Power that gave us facilities above the beasts, he did what man could not—detected and brought to justice the one guilty from out an army."

Cooper in his novels shows his love for the dog, when he makes him a companion of Deerslayer for years, following his master through valleys and glens and along the Hudson. "Natty" and his faithful friend eventually drift across the Mississippi and Missouri rivers, and both find their graves in Nebraska. The sad bereavement of the hunter is touchingly penciled in "The Prairie," and although old in years, the

dog was always a "pup" in the eyes of the old hunter. And then, when the old man, sickened and enfeebled with age, and knowing he was soon to pass into the Valley of the Shadow of Death, among his last requests was one, that there be engraved on the lock of his rifle a "hound's ear" in remembrance of his honored dog. This volume of Cooper's novels, "The Prairie," has always been of great interest to me, for I believe I have hunted geese in the same territory where most of the incidents of that book are laid.

The love of the dog for his master is not confined to those of blue-blood pedigree; neither to those whose whole life has been passed where their every want has been anticipated and gratified; but curs of low degree, who have been compelled to gain sustenance as best they could, beaten, kicked and half-starved, form an attachment that only dies with them.

One of the most touching incidents of the faithfulness of the dog that ever came to my attention occurred in Chicago, and was made the subject of the following notice in a local paper in that city:

"Those who have nothing but curses and kicks for dogs and are ever wishing their extermination, would, perhaps, be better citizens did they possess the same strong attachments and friendships often exhibited by them, and particularly by a large black and white Newfoundland dog a few days ago during the excessively cold weather. For some days he was noticed on the pier off Lincoln Park intently watching the water, and every now and then would go to the ice and water and scratch, as if endeavoring to dig up something. All through the bitter cold weather, night and day, he faced the wintry blasts of the lake, and could not be

persuaded to leave his solitary vigil. The park police, finding all efforts to get him from the pier futile, made a bed for him, and daily brought him food, which he refused. At last one morning he was found dead on the ice. The supposition is that his master had fallen into the lake accidentally or had committed suicide. He was only a dog, yet how many human beings could be found like him?"

The following by "Will-o'-the-Wisp" touchingly refers to it:

What seeks he there?
That noble "Landseer" Newfoundland.
Is it obedience to command
That, all unflagging, makes him stand
On the wind-swept shore so bleak and bare?

What seeks he there?
With wistful eyes, twin wells of woe,
With mournful whine so sad and low,
With sentinel tramping to and fro,
On the wind swept shore so bleak and bare?

What seeks he there?
When halting on his lonesome beat,
He scratches still with bleeding feet
Where heaping ice and water meet,
On the wind-swept shore so bleak and bare.

What seeks he there?
E'en when his faltering footsteps fail
To longer mark his bloody trail,
He crouches down with anguished wail,
On the wind-swept shore so bleak and bare.

What seeks he there?
It is not food, for proffered meats
With no responsive wag he greets,
But every action search entreats,
On the wind-swept shore so bleak and bare.

What seeks he there?
Is it his master whelmed in the tide,
That piling ice blocks ruthlessly hide?
Is it for him that he watched and died
On that wind-swept shore so bleak and bare?

The pathetic story of this Newfoundland finds a companion piece in that of the spaniel. The scene is laid on a dock where steamers land; 'tis twilight, and the dull gray of coming night is fast settling over the earth and water. Dimly in the distance can be seen a steam-

er fast disappearing; a low, black hull as she plows through the wild water, leaves behind it a troubled wake. The dense, black smoke overshadows the darkness of approaching night. On the dock there stands, half crouched, as if debating whether or not to plunge into the water, a spaniel —one of the handsomest of its kind. Every appearance denotes his utter despair. The winds blow wildly through his pendulous ears, and twines around his legs the silken hair of his tail; around his neck he has a collar, fastened into this a rope, whose ragged end trails on the dock,—the ends show fine strands, indicating that he has gnawed it off. So he has. Chained to his kennel he witnessed the departure of his master; he tried in vain to follow him; he sought to break the ties that bound him, but could not. Fiercely he attacks the rope with his sharp teeth, and is free. He rushes in the direction of his departing master, and arrives at the dock, too late, as the vessel is far from shore. What he then does is depicted in these beautiful lines:

"He has strained the rope which bound him, and at last has broken free
Too late! for there the steamer bears his master out to sea.
He is but a dog, and yet he has the yearnings of his kind,
And his heart is fairly breaking, that he is left behind.

With an effort he might reach him, if he struggles with a will;
The master has forgotten, but the dog remembers still,
Plunge, the way is long and weary, and the distance grows more wide,
But he has one hope to guide him, just to reach his master's side.

Struggling, ever struggling onward, though the water beats him back,
Struggling while his heart is failing, in the steamer's silver track;
Struggling with a last vain effort; struggling till his strength is gone;
So the blue waves close over him, and the twilight hastens on."

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